

MADE "FIT FOR KINGS": THE 1960S KENNEDY RENOVATION OF
BLAIR HOUSE, THE PRESIDENT'S GUEST HOUSE

by

John S. Botello
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of
Master of
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_____ Director

_____ Program Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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by

John S. Botello
Bachelor of Arts
Texas Tech University, 2013

Director: Jennifer Van Horn, Assistant Professor
Department of History of Decorative Arts

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Fairfax, VA



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my God, my family, and my friends. I am a blessed individual to have the love, support, and encouragement from each member of my family and closest friends.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Blair House Fine Arts Committee..... BHFAC

ABSTRACT

MADE “FIT FOR KINGS”: THE 1960S KENNEDY RENOVATION OF BLAIR HOUSE, THE PRESIDENT’S GUEST HOUSE

John S. Botello, M.A.

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Thesis Director: Dr. Jennifer Van Horn

This thesis examines the collaborative efforts of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, First Lady Claudia {Lady Bird} Johnson, and Ambassador Robin Chandler Dukes’ transformation of the outdated and stark 1940s interiors of Blair House, The President’s Guest House, into a more updated and hospitable environment on par with the White House interiors. Mrs. Kennedy and her collaborators extended the aesthetic of the 1960s White House to Blair House to create the “same feeling [between] Blair House and the White House,” as the First Lady articulated.

Blair House’s improved program of American heritage and diplomacy was established during the Kennedy administration’s rejuvenation of the American arts and refined government protocol. Through Mrs. Kennedy’s efforts in restoring and re-designing both the White House and Blair House, she (and those women who assisted her) crafted a hospitable diplomatic presence they deemed suitable for kings and queens.

INTRODUCTION: AN OUTDATED BLAIR HOUSE

Situated across the street from the White House at 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue, Blair House, The President's Guest House has served as the official residence for visiting heads of state to the United States since the early 1940's. The U.S. government officially acquired the house on December 11, 1942. President Franklin D. Roosevelt took a great interest in Blair House and oversaw its acquirement as an official government owned property.

Before its acquirement as an official government residence under the Department of State, Blair House stood as one of Washington's most prominent homes within the President's neighborhood. The Lovell and Blair families owned and lived in the home. Blair House's first owner, Dr. Joseph Lovell, who served as the Surgeon General of the United States Army from 1818-1836, commissioned the house to be built in 1824 by an unknown architect. As a prominent member of the Washington socialite circle, Dr. Lovell entertained high-class Washington groups and dwelled within the popular posh neighborhood surrounding the White House. After Dr. Lovell's death on October 17,

1836, Francis Preston Blair purchased the house in December of the same year.¹ Francis Preston Blair uprooted his family from Kentucky in 1830 and positioned himself within Washington's news reporting empire. Once in Washington, Blair established his newspaper called the *Globe* under the administration of President Andrew Jackson.² His advanced skills in reporting national news and swaying public opinion positioned him in close proximity to President Jackson.³ From 1830 to 1836, Blair proceeded to "publish the *Congressional Globe* for the reporting of the proceedings in both the House of Representatives and the Senate" and established himself as a personal advisor within President Jackson's "powerful intimate group...called the Kitchen Cabinet."⁴ The success of his newspapers and propinquity to the executive office of the President provided Blair the ability to purchase the house from the Lovell family in 1836. Purchased for \$6,500, *The National Intelligencer* advertised the sale of the house with the description,

¹ Katherine Elizabeth Crane, *Blair House Past and Present: An Account of Its Life and Times in the City of Washington* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State, 1945), 12. Several scholars and museum curators have written histories of Blair House and its historic furnishings and social history. The major works from which I will draw upon include: Candace Shireman, *To Be Preserved for All Time: The Major and the President Save Blair House* (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 2013), Margaret Means Newman, "To Adorn This Past: Family Furniture Collection at the Blair House." (The Smithsonian Associates and Corcoran College of Art + Design, 2009), Mary Edith Wilroy and Lucie Prinz, *Inside Blair House: An Intimate Look at Life behind the Door of the President's Guest House* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), Eleanor Lee Templeman, *The Blair-Lee House* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1980), and Elizabeth L. T. Brown and Selwa Roosevelt, eds., *Blair House: The President's Guest House* (Washington, D.C.: The Blair House Restoration Fund, 1989).

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

“A spacious two-story brick building, with a basement; was built under the eye of the late proprietor for his permanent residence, and has every convenience, ...a well of excellent water in the yard; brick stable and carriage house adjoining the alley; flower and fruit garden tastefully laid out and highly cultivated.”⁵

Three generations of the Blair family occupied the house until its purchase from the US government in 1942. Major Gist Blair, the grandson of Francis Preston Blair and Major-Judge Advocate in the War Department, was one of the last Blair family members to occupy the house. As an avid collector of decorative arts, Gist Blair obtained a deep desire to preserve Blair House as a prominent residence within the President’s neighborhood. During the 1930’s era of Colonial Revivalism and enthusiasm for early American decorative arts by individuals such as Henry Francis DuPont, Henry Flynt, and Henry Ford, Gist Blair sought to maintain and preserve his family’s collection of historic furnishings and collect additional nineteenth-century varieties of furniture, ceramics, glass, silver, art, prints, and books.⁶ Upon his death on December 16, 1940, Blair House was left in the remains of Gist Blair’s nephew Dr. Montgomery Blair Jr. Both

⁵ Eleanor Lee Templeman, *The Blair-Lee House* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1980), 20.

⁶ Candace Shireman, *To Be Preserved for All Time: The Major and the President Save Blair House* (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 2013), 8. Throughout this thesis, I mention the Colonial Revival. When mentioned, I will be making reference to the massive interest in the colonial American past. The colonial American past is defined loosely from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century. From 1876 to the 1960s, a resurgence of American history and patriotism were of high interest within interior design. The major works referenced on the Colonial Revival include: Richard Guy Wilson, “What Is the Colonial Revival?” In *Recreating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), Kenneth Ames, *The Colonial Revival in America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), and Thomas Andrew Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Montgomery Blair Jr. and the family's second cousin Percy A. Blair fought the battle of preserving Blair House and establishing its use as an official government residence. With President Franklin D. Roosevelt's interest in acquiring Blair House as the President's official guest residence and the "Department of State['s] completed negotiations for its purchase on October 29, 1942," the U.S. government officially obtained the title and ownership of the house.⁷

As Blair House continued into its program of diplomatic hospitality in the early 1960s, its heavy use during the 1940s and 1950s became noticeable through the evidence of worn furnishings and building material. Before its refurbishing and renovation during the Kennedy era, Blair House had been used as the guest residence for visiting foreign heads of state and a temporary White House for President Harry S. Truman between 1948 and 1952. In 1948, the White House began to show evidence of plaster cracking and sagging of floors. Shortly after a performed structural analysis during the summer of 1948, Margaret Truman's piano leg fell through the floorboards within the house.⁸ Because of the physical weakness, a structural overhaul and gutting of the White House interiors was conducted. President Truman and his family found refuge during the four years of White House construction at Blair House. During Truman's residency, little to no adaptations were made to Blair House. President Truman used a small room adjacent to the front entrance hall in the Lee House as his office, known today as the Truman Study.

⁷ Templeman, *The Blair-Lee House*, 64.

⁸ William Seale, *The White House: The History of an American Idea* (Washington, D.C.: The White House Historical Association, 2001), 238.

Lee House, acquired by the U.S. Government in 1943, sits adjacent to Blair House.⁹ The Lee House interiors later connected to Blair House interiors through the addition of a doorway constructed in between the two houses. Gladys Miller supervised the decoration of both Blair House and Lee House. The interiors reflected a bland aesthetic, unparalleled to the White House, by the 1960s. The mix of Blair family antiques, 1940s floral upholstery, and eclectic furnishings presented the President's guest house as an outdated and drab hotel upon the arrival of the Kennedys.

On a cold winter day in January of 1961, John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as the 35th President of the United States. From the beginning, both President Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy understood the importance of imagery and the material persona of the Presidency. To Washington, Mrs. Kennedy brought a style and sophistication unknown to the prior administrations. This style and sophistication derived from her upbringing, education, and preference for European taste. President Kennedy properly balanced Mrs. Kennedy's attractive and nationally recognized appearance with his eloquent words and ability to stir American pride and national identity across the United States. A rebirth of revolutionary American taste through the young and cultured Kennedy lens established a surge of national identity within the overall aesthetic of American interior and exterior environments. The Kennedys, as described by scholars James Abbot and Elaine Rice, were "a younger generation that embodied the country's

⁹ Elizabeth L. T. Brown and Selwa Roosevelt, eds., *Blair House: The President's Guest House* (Washington, D.C.: The Blair House Restoration Fund, 1989), 28.

future, yet appreciated the glory of its past.”¹⁰ This appreciation of the past acknowledged Mrs. Kennedy’s drive to re-establish a visual presence in Washington, reflective of America’s finest arts and craftsmanship. She adequately enacted what the poet Robert Frost wrote, “a cultural renaissance in America.”¹¹

Almost immediately after arriving to the White House in 1961, Mrs. Kennedy rolled up her sleeves and focused her attention to the refurbishing and renovation of the White House. From a young age, Mrs. Kennedy understood the need for an improved White House, filled with meaningful American cultural history, decorative arts, and fine art. With the majority of furnishings in the White House having a 1940s provenance, Mrs. Kennedy worked to reconfigure and acquire decorative arts and fine art which would “have a reason for being there.”¹² Mrs. Kennedy explained in an interview with *Life* magazine, “It would be a sacrilege merely to ‘redecorate’ [the White House] – a word I hate. It must be restored – and that has nothing to do with decoration. That is a question of scholarship.”¹³ From the beginning of Mrs. Kennedy’s initiatives to reinstate the White House as a residence reflective of “traditional” American taste, she established

¹⁰ James A. Abbott and Elaine M. Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1998), 1. Mention of the poet Robert Frost is frequent in Kennedy scholarship pertaining to the White House aesthetic and their influence on American culture and arts. Both *Designing Camelot* and Elaine Rice’s article titled “Circa 1961: The Kennedy White House Interiors” *White House History*, No. 14, (Winter 2004), explain that the Kennedys were inviting artists and performers to President Kennedy’s inauguration. Robert Frost was remembered as reading a poem during the inauguration. Both Rice and Abbott reference Douglass Carter’s work, “The Kennedy Look in the Arts,” *Horizon*, Vol. IV, No. 1, (September 1961).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹² Hugh Sidey, “The First Lady Brings History and Beauty to the White House,” *Life*, September 1, 1961, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 57.

an aesthetic which quickly inspired other government buildings and residences such as Blair House. Not long after Mrs. Kennedy began the White House restoration, her friend Robin Chandler Duke, wife of the U.S. Chief of Protocol, Angier Biddle Duke quickly originated the plan to renovate and refurbish Blair House in a similar manner to Mrs. Kennedy's White House.

CHAPTER ONE: A NEW VISION OF FUNCTION AND HOSPITALITY

Upon the election of President Kennedy, Blair House stood quite sparse and not equipped with the proper instruments and essentials used to entertain and host visiting heads of state and their delegations. The house lacked a new vision of function and hospitality for the President's guests. This new vision became a reality by the wife of the U.S. Chief of Protocol, Angier Biddle Duke, beginning in the spring of 1963.

During the spring of 1962, Angier Biddle Duke served within the State Department as the U.S. Chief of Protocol. At that time, Ambassador Duke was unmarried and serving the role by himself. Traditionally, during this time, wives of prominent men in political and powerful positions took on the role as official hostesses within their husband's position. This traditional and customary role of hostess also existed at Blair House. The wife of a U.S. Chief of Protocol typically involved themselves in the care, décor, hospitality, and aesthetic value of Blair House. In 1961, Ambassador Duke's wife, Lulu Duke tragically died in a plane crash taking her to the Duke's vacation house in Southampton, Long Island.¹⁴ Just one year after the death of Ambassador Duke's wife, he met Robin Lynn.

By 1962, Blair House lacked both in quality of aesthetics and quantity of materials necessary to function as a guest house. From 1961 to 1975, Mary Edith Wilroy served as Blair House Manager and worked under the U.S. Chief of Protocol. Her

¹⁴ Mary Edith Wilroy and Lucie Prinz, *Inside Blair House: An Intimate Look at Life behind the Door of the President's Guest House* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), 51.

memories of the Blair House renovation under Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Duke were collected and expressed within a larger work by both Mary Edith Wilroy and Lucie Prinz titled, *Inside Blair House: An Intimate Look at Life behind the Door of the President's Guest House*. Within Wilroy and Prinz's book, it is understood Ms. Wilroy's exhaustion of Blair House's needed improvements in 1962. At the peak of Ms. Wilroy's needs, Jay Rutherford, an assistant to Ambassador Duke, called her from the State Department and said, "About that list[s] of things you say you need over at Blair House...do you think you could hold off on them for now and maybe not push so hard? If you could wait, I think we're going to be getting a lot of those things very soon."¹⁵ At this point in time, Ms. Wilroy direly desired the improvements and found herself out of options. Blair House still appeared in many ways the same as it did in the 1940's with few alterations. During her conversation with Mr. Rutherford, Ms. Wilroy thought to herself,

"[everything] sounded very mysterious. [she] knew Mrs. Kennedy was working very hard by then on the [restoration, refurbishing, and] redecoration of the White House, and [she] guessed that maybe she was getting ready to work for Blair House, too, so [she] said, 'Okay, Jay. Just as long as we don't have to wait too long. Some of those things are really vital. For instance-...' Trust me,' Jay interrupted. 'I think you'll get just about everything you need. You'll see.'"¹⁶

When Mr. Rutherford expressed to Ms. Wilroy "You'll see," he made reference to Ms. Robin Lynn. Little did Ms. Wilroy know during the time of the conversation, Ms. Robin Lynn would become the major source of change for Blair House. Not many days after the

¹⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹⁶ Ibid., 52.

phone call, Mr. Rutherford brought Ms. Robin Lynn over to Blair House.¹⁷ Very quickly, she took an interest. She immediately understood its need for improvements. From basic essentials such as television sets, radios, sheets, mens' razors, and cuff links to more formalized furnishings such as drapes, wallpaper, architectural application, furniture, and upholstery, Ms. Robin Lynn developed a passion to take on the project.

As with all major endeavors focusing on the improvement of a major historic site, a project manager is required. Ms. Lynn exemplified the perfect person for such a job. Her connection with Blair House came very suddenly upon her marriage to Ambassador Duke. On May 12, 1962, Ms. Lynn became Mrs. Angier Biddle Duke and the new wife of the Ambassador. With this title, she befitted the lead managerial role of a project of which she found great interest. Her connection with Mrs. Kennedy derived through her new marriage. Both President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy attended the wedding reception of Ambassador Duke and Mrs. Duke at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Ridder in Georgetown of Washington, D.C. (fig. 1). Just weeks following the wedding, both Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Duke became quite the friends. As the wife of the U.S. Chief of Protocol, Mrs. Duke participated in official White House and State Department dinners, social functions, and ceremonial events (fig. 2). In having this official role as the honorary hostess of Blair House, Mrs. Duke corresponded quite frequently with Mrs. Kennedy in regards to the Blair House project.

¹⁷ Ibid., 52.



Figure 1 First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy chats with Robin Chandler Lynn, wife of Angier Biddle Duke, following a Georgetown wedding reception. May 12, 1962. Image from the Associated Press/Henry Burroughs.



Figure 2 President Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan of India Departs White House. June 3, 1963. President John F. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy stand at the center. US Chief of Protocol, Angier Biddle Duke, stands at right (back to camera); Robin Chandler Duke (wife of Ambassador Duke) stands at far left. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

Before the project could commence, Mrs. Duke had to formulate a group or committee, from which she could seek council and input for the restoration and renovation of Blair House. To do this, she looked to Ms. Kennedy's Fine Arts Committee for the White House. By the spring of 1961, Mrs. Kennedy had begun to formulate a well suited group of cultured scholars, academics, collectors, decorators, and socialites for her fine arts committee at the White House. These well rounded individuals included Chairman Henry Francis du Pont, Mrs. C. Douglas Dillon, Mrs. Paul Mellon, Mrs. Henry Parish II, Mr. John Walker III, and Mrs. Charles B. Wrightsman. Upon the suggestions of Mr. du Pont, Mrs. Kennedy established a Fine Arts Advisory Committee to evaluate the collections to be obtained for the White House. Furthermore, the advisory committee served to assist with fine and decorative arts research relevant to the times.¹⁸ Among the members on this advisory committee sat Mr. James Biddle, Assistant Curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dr. Lyman H. Butterfield, Editor at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Mr. Gerald G. Gibson, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts at the Henry Ford Museum, Mr. John M. Graham II, Director and Curator of Collections at Colonial Williamsburg, Mr. John A. H. Sweeney, Curator at The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, and Mr. C. Malcom Watkins, Curator within the Division of Cultural History at the Smithsonian Institution. Thus, when Mrs. Duke found herself in the midst of establishing a committee, Mrs. Kennedy's committee had already been set in place. According to Ms. Wilroy, "Robin's group, like [Mrs. Kennedy's] consisted of people who wanted to contribute furnishings, those who wanted

¹⁸ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 23.

to contribute money, and several professionals active in the artistic world in Washington who acted as consultants to help ensure that the contributions would be of high quality.”¹⁹

By the fall of 1962, Mrs. Duke began to pull together a group for her committee. She named the group the Blair House Fine Arts Committee (BHFAC), known today as the Blair House Restoration Fund. A few of the same individuals on Mrs. Kennedy’s fine arts committee joined Mrs. Duke’s committee. The group consisted of a mix of prominent individuals within the political, societal, and curatorial realms. An excerpt from Mrs. Duke’s minutes of the first BHFAC meeting stated (fig. 3),

“The first Meeting of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee was held on Tuesday, April 16, 1963 at Blair House. The Meeting was presided over by the Chairman of the Committee, Mrs. Angier Biddle Duke. The Members of the Committee who were present included: Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, [Honorary Co-Chairman], Mrs. Harcourt Amory, Jr., Mrs. Lucius D. Battle, Mr. LeMoyné Billings, Dr. Montgomery Blair, Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, Mrs. William J. Clothier, II, Mrs. John Sherman Cooper, Mrs. Robert W. Dowling, Mrs. John R. Fell, Miss Kay Halle, Mrs. Howell H. Howard, Mrs. Claiborne Pell, Mr. Walter G. Peter, Jr., Mrs. Ralph K. Robertson, [and] Mr. John Walker, III.”²⁰

As with Mrs. Kennedy’s committee, Mrs. Duke specifically sought after both scholars and individuals with political clout and urbane taste. Mr. John Walker III, Director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Mr. David Finley, the first Director of the National Gallery of Art and founding chairman of both the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the White House Historical Association, and Mrs. C. Douglas Dillon, wife of the Secretary of the Treasury all served on both committees for the White House

¹⁹ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 58.

²⁰ Robin C. L. Duke, “Minutes of the First Meeting of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee, April 16, 1963,” April 16, 1963, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State, 1.

and Blair House. Due to the high intensity of cultural driven domesticity among the wives of high ranking officials, the majority of females involved in both fine arts committees naturally filled the category of individuals with refined taste, heavy pocketbooks, and influential members of Washington society. A part from the females associated with a professional roles in interior decorating, the majority of professional individuals involved with the committees were men. These men worked in cultural arts, humanities, history, and design roles within major institutions. Their expertise in the interpretation of historic spaces and scholarship in the fine and decorative arts provided what authors Abbott and Rice stated as an assurance within national recognition.²¹

²¹ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 23. It is important to note that both authors James Abbott and Elaine Rice serve as the two major contemporary scholars providing the most extensive scholarship of the Kennedy White House renovation from 1961-1963. This thesis heavily draws from their scholarship and extends their ideas to the Blair House renovation from which I have added and tied to the concept of diplomacy.



Figure 3 The Blair House Fine Arts Committee List. July 18, 1963. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Like Mr. Henry Francis du Pont, many of the women positioned within these committees held a “philosophy [which] often had less to do with historical authenticity and more to do with an antiquarian’s vision of a grand and ordered past.”²² This vision of a “grand and ordered past” was heavily influenced from the iconography of Mrs. Kennedy. As the wife of the country’s highest ranking official, she, like the other wives

²² Ibid., 21. Works referenced to understand du Pont’s personal aesthetic and fascination with America’s heritage include: John Sweeney, *Henry Francis Dupont 1880-1969* (Winterthur, DE: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1980), Wendy Cooper *An American Vision: Henry Francis Du Pont’s Winterthur Museum* (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 2002), and Maggie Lidz *The Du Ponts: Houses and Gardens in the Brandywine* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2009).

of the fine art committees, inevitably received the platform of “furnishings and china” to contribute and influence the community around her. Scholars such as David M. Lubin suggests Mrs. Kennedy “tried to play the role of [a housewife]...to achieve ultimate satisfaction in life, [but possibly]...suffocate[ed] in the feminine mystique.”²³ Whether or not Mrs. Kennedy truly felt forced in her role as the country’s most prestigious “housewife,” she used this position as a way to celebrate and ignite national interest in America’s past and present. She, herself, became equally influential as the President with her understanding of visual culture.

Though Mrs. Kennedy required the scholarly authenticity to back her initiatives at the White House, she created quite her own institution of diplomacy and tasteful American hospitality through her devotion to the arts and visual persona of the presidency. This visual persona was derived from the refurbished and renovated White House. During the configuration of Mrs. Duke’s fine arts committee, Mrs. Kennedy found herself knee deep with the final designs and finishing touches of the White House. Due to this fact, she took great interest in the initial plan for Blair House.

Both Mrs. Duke and Mrs. Kennedy understood the importance of transforming Blair House to function as an official extension of the White House. Mrs. Kennedy, who worked tirelessly to oversee the smallest details within the projects, considered the extended

²³ David M. Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 80. The “feminine mystique” refers to a book mentioned by Lubin. The book, originally published in 1963, is by author Betty Friedan and is titled *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001). Lubin explains that this book covers the ultimate phenomenon of middle-class women and “the problem with no name.” This problem referred the concept of middle-class housewives and their “dissatisfaction” with their roles in life.

White House's aesthetic very important. One of Mrs. Kennedy's known interests in Mrs. Duke's work came from a letter written by Mrs. Kennedy on April 7, 1962, just nine days before the BHFAC's first meeting. Mrs. Kennedy's letter began by her explaining one of her dearest friends LeMoyne Billings, who was appointed to the Blair House committee, told Mrs. Kennedy of his excitement to be a part of such a great project. Mr. Billings' Blair House renovation updates made Mrs. Kennedy very curious. From her curiosity, she continued her letter by asking Mrs. Duke to provide information regarding "a couple of things."²⁴ Her "couple of things" eluded to more overarching questions about the Blair House renovation. Though she first expresses her ideas relating to fundraising, design suggestions, and organizational matters of the project, her final agenda towards the end of the letter stated her desire to be the honorary chairman. In her words, she states,

"I thought if you would like me to be Honorary Chairman of your Committee, and when you get if formed, Pam [Turnure, Mrs. Kennedy's Press Secretary,] and you and I could work out some announcement as of your project – giving all credit to you and saying that the W. H. feels that the President's Guest House should be restored with as much care as the W. H. then the offers will start coming in again. So many things you could use...lovely engravings, miniatures, furniture, \$'s etc. and they could go to Blair-Lee House and the new corner one.²⁵ I do think an announcement would help [g]et some document which they all seem to treasure and frame, thanking them for their gift from the W. H. Historical Association."²⁶

²⁴ Jacqueline Kennedy, "Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding Mrs. Kennedy's Involvement with the Blair House Restoration)," April 7, 1963, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State, 1.

²⁵ Mrs. Kennedy's referral to the "corner one" is the corner house at 700 Jackson Place and Pennsylvania Ave. This house was connected to Blair House and was the former home of Peter Parker. It was not until the 1970's that the former Peter Parker house on the corner was added to Blair House and simply called "Jackson Place."

²⁶ Kennedy, "Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding Mrs. Kennedy's Involvement with the Blair House Restoration)." 2.

Within this letter, Mrs. Kennedy make it quite clear to Mrs. Duke how critical she found it to be involved. Though “interfering” was never her intention, Mrs. Kennedy desired to know of all the logistics of Mrs. Duke’s strategies and expected her to “keep [her] informed as [she went] about changing each room.”²⁷ Mrs. Kennedy explained Blair House had remained on her conscience since the time they had first arrived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.²⁸ After all, Mrs. Kennedy explained, “it IS his Guest House, [and] I would love to know the plans you have.”²⁹ She continued to explain her interests to Mrs. Duke by stating, “I made a couple of fleeting trips there and rearranged furniture – but the W. H. just took all my time. As it is the President’s Guest House, thank Heavens at least there is someone like you with taste and energy to cope with it.”³⁰ She greatly appreciated and thought it appropriate Blair House had begun to be addressed as “The President’s Guest House.” Because of this fact, she felt nothing should hold her back from being involved in its renovation.

Not long after the final stages of her own renovation project, Mrs. Kennedy’s most sincere concerns dealt with the funding source of her husband’s guest residence. Knowing firsthand the struggles and continual loop holes faced at the White House, she sought out to help Mrs. Duke – even in the most discreet ways. Seeing Mrs. Kennedy had officially announced to the public she completed her White House renovation project just weeks before writing the letter to Mrs. Duke, she became quite interested at that point to

²⁷ Ibid., 1.

²⁸ Ibid., 1.

²⁹ Ibid., 1.

³⁰ Ibid., 1.

help contribute funding towards Blair House.³¹ In order to do this, she used additional funding from the only consistent source of revenue she had developed – her official guide book of the White House.

Up until 1962, no sort of White House guidebook had ever been published. Mrs. Kennedy strongly desired to provide visitors to the White House with an educational resource which promoted the history of the executive mansion. Mrs. Kennedy found such a resource very dear to her heart. During her first visit to the White House at the age of eleven, she was quite shocked how no historic interpretation of the house was set in place nor any sort of pamphlet or guidebook to lead visitors through the spaces. Within Hugh Sidey's *Life* magazine interview, Mrs. Kennedy recollected her first visit as an adolescent and stated, "from the outside I remember the feeling of the place. But inside, all I remember is suffering through. There wasn't even a booklet you could buy. Mount Vernon and the National Gallery of Art and the FBI made a far greater impression."³²

In order to sell and generate a consistent flow of revenue from sources beyond the government, a separate partnering affiliation had to come into existence. With the help of David Finley, who helped generate the idea, Mrs. Kennedy established the White House Historical Association on November 2, 1961 - one of the most successful and supportive entities of the White House. Today, the association's mission remains as it did in 1961,

"[To] enhance the understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Executive Mansion. It was created at the recommendation of the National Park Service and with the support of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. All proceeds from the sale of the Associations books and products are used to fund the acquisition of historic furnishings and artwork for the permanent

³¹ Ibid., 1.

³² Sidey, "The First Lady Brings History and Beauty to the White House." 62.

White House collection, assist in the preservation of public rooms, and further its educational mission.

Once the association had been created and the board of directors formed, its priorities centered on the publication of the guide book. The first edition of *The White House: An Historic Guide* was published in 1962. Lorraine Pearce, a Smithsonian curator, wrote the historic content for the guidebook.³³ In addition to writing the guidebook's content, she served as the first museum professional appointed to the curatorial tasks at the White House. According to White House scholar, William Seale, Robert L. Breeden "of the National Geographic Society...remembered that Mrs. Kennedy used her editorial pencil liberally to make comments on both the text and the design. [Once published,] more than a million copies sold at one dollar each, contributing handsomely to the decoration fund."³⁴

After the majority of the White House renovations reached completion in the spring of 1962, Mrs. Kennedy looked to the Blair House as the next project to fund. As discussed in her letter to Mrs. Duke on April 7, 1962, she produced the guidebook to offer current White House scholarship and provide ongoing capital gain. She quite bluntly expressed, "I am glad it is sometimes called the President's Guest House – as that gives the W. H. an excuse to divert guidebook funds to it...[she continued,] (don't

³³ William Seale, *The President's House* (Washington, D.C.: The White House Historical Association, 1986), 343.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 343.

discuss this little plot of mine with anyone as I have to be correct and clear it with W. H. Historical Association...but I now they will say yes! They must!).”³⁵

Though the majority of funding for the Blair House renovation came from private donations, Mrs. Kennedy had great intent and interest in the beautification of the White House’s hospitable extension. Blair House’s function was the first and foremost undertaking to tackle. While the major renovation of rooms took place in early fall of 1962, Mrs. Duke stressed in her first committee meeting on April 16, 1962 the importance to first acquire the “basic items” required to make the house functional. Within her first meeting, she challenged all the of the committee members to seek out donations for the bare essentials. Mrs. Duke explained to her members she had a yearly government budget of \$2,000 to \$3,000 to operate both Blair House and Lee House.³⁶ With such a low budget, she stressed the critical need for each member to contribute by either donating private funds or seeking out corporate donations. Because Blair House closed during the summer of 1963 for structural repairs, installation of a new electrical system, air conditioning units, and a new kitchen, Mrs. Duke strongly encouraged each member to take advantage of the time of closure to collect the basic items before their next meeting in the fall. Before listing the basic needs to everyone present at the meeting, she stated, “I hope that you won’t laugh at me, because I am sure you will look at the list and say, ‘Good heavens, sewing kits, shirt studs and cuff links. What does she mean?’”³⁷

³⁵ Kennedy, “Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding Mrs. Kennedy’s Involvement with the Blair House Restoration).” 1.

³⁶ Duke, “Minutes of the First Meeting of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee, April 16, 1963.” 8.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

Items such as these and others, such as breakfast trays, china, combs, scissors, bud vases, cigarette lighters, electric clocks, radios, television sets, electric shavers, sheets, linens, blankets, and sewing machines, were considered by Mrs. Duke as basic needs which “ha[d] nothing to do with decorating the house or making it more beautiful. They ha[d] a lot to do with making it more hospitable, more comfortable and more pleasant and attractive for [their] visitors (fig. 4).”³⁸

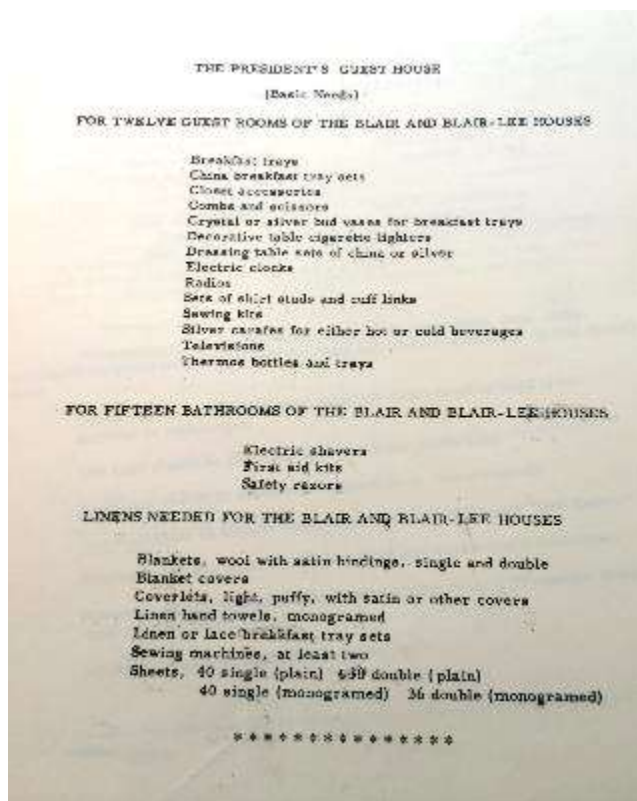


Figure 4 The Blair House Fine Arts Committee Agenda. April 16, 1963. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

³⁸ Ibid., 3.

Acquiring the basic needs for Blair House was the first step to improving the Kennedy program for American diplomacy through visual culture. Visiting Blair House for many foreign heads of state, would be the first time they experienced the finer luxuries in life. Items such as new breakfast trays were just as important as the entire renovation of the public rooms and guest bedrooms. Mrs. Duke expressed herself quite passionately when saying, “it is kind of embarrassing when you have the King of Morocco or the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg and you have to bring up breakfast on anything you can find.”³⁹ America not only needed to symbolize freedom, power, and peace to other nations, but it also needed to symbolize technological progress and innovation. Mrs. Duke stressed this to the committee by acknowledging the need for radios and television sets. It baffled Mrs. Duke to re-imagine “the King of Morocco and his sister and everyone looking at [the only large television downstairs], because they can’t all see it at once.” Having a small television set in each room did not seem an

“enormous expenditure [seeing that]...a state visitor is here two days working like a beaver with the President and the Secretary of State. This is the one place where he touches base. When he is shaving or dressing he flips on a television and see another dimension of our whole life and this community he is visiting. Why not? Why shouldn’t we have this?”⁴⁰

Details such as television sets made a huge impact on Blair House. For some foreign heads of state, it meant everything. When color sets came to Blair House in 1965, the wife of the President of Upper Volta, Mrs. Maurice Yameogo did not leave her room for three days. According to Mrs. Wilroy, “she spoke very little English and was shy, but in

³⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

fact she had fallen in love with television. [Instead of attending the embassy reception she had] dinner on a tray in front of the TV set, where she stayed having a lovely time all by herself.”⁴¹ Mrs. Duke and Mrs. Kennedy recognized providing these amenities and luxuries for visitors in the United States most important. From the grand plush drawings rooms to the television sets and cuff links, every large and small detail played a vital role in establishing positive and peaceful relationships between foreign countries and the United States.

⁴¹ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 157.

CHAPTER TWO: RENOVATING A DIPLOMATIC RESIDENCE

Renovating a diplomatic residence, reflective of the White House, was the most important goal for both Mrs. Duke and Mrs. Kennedy. Within Mrs. Duke's history of Blair House report, she expressed, "it was [the BHFAC's] hope that [they] could bring about the quality and excellence in Blair House that Mrs. Kennedy had instituted in the White House."⁴² This quality and excellence would be implemented by using an existing collection of antiques, donated antique furnishings, fine fabrics for draperies and upholstery, and historic wallpaper. This complete package generated a complimentary aesthetic similar to the White House. Quite notorious for her stately interiors, Mrs. Kennedy's White House reflected an early nineteenth-century America and Europe. Her most important interior designers, Stéphane Boudin and Sister Parish, popularized historic American interiors within a modern society. As with the White House, the same popular style made its way into the renovation of Blair House. On April 18, 1963, Dorothy McCardle, Senior Society Reporter for the *Washington Post*, said it best when she titled her Blair House article, "New Old Look For Blair House."⁴³ Cultured, educated, and tasteful individuals such as Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Duke, and their designers were in the business of creating a "new old look" within government residences. A resurgence of America's refined past paralleled with the contemporary Kennedy persona.

⁴² Robin C. L. Duke, "Blair House History (Mrs. Duke's Speech)," n.d., Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State, 10.

⁴³ Dorothy McCardle, "New Old Look For Blair House," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1963, photocopy, BHFAC Records 1961-1969, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Blair Front and Rear Drawing Room and Blair Dining Room

From the fall of 1963 to the fall of 1964, Blair House underwent a dramatic transformation room by room. The first phase of the project renovated a large portion of the first floor which included rooms both in Blair House and the connected Lee House. During this era, Lee House was called Blair-Lee House. Any room or space labeled simply as “Blair” was only used for rooms or spaces within Blair House proper. Not until the later 1960s and early 1970s renovation of Blair House did it connect with the two other adjacent townhouses on the corner of Jackson Place and Pennsylvania Avenue. The two townhouses purchased by the U.S. Department of State and conjoined to Blair House complex consisted of the former Peter Parker and Edward Townsend houses (fig.5). During the Kennedy and Johnson era, only the Lee House and Blair House were renovated.



Figure 5 Front Exterior of Blair House, Washington, D.C., Lee House (left), Blair House proper (center), Peter Parker House/Edward Townsend House (left). December 2007. Photographs in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Between the first BHFAC meeting in April of 1963 to the early fall of the same year, the Government Services Administration (GSA) worked to incorporate a variety of upgrades in the house. During the summer and early fall, the first rooms to begin renovation included both the Blair Front and Rear Drawing Rooms and Blair Dining Room. The floorplans of Blair House during these renovations showed only the connection between Blair House proper and Lee House (fig. 6,7,8,9). The Blair Front and Rear Drawing Rooms are situated on the left side of Blair House entrance hall. The Dining Room sat positioned to the right of entrance hall (fig. 6). Both of these drawing rooms remained a part of the original 1824 structure and had primarily been used as formal parlors (fig. 10, 11). As with all the rooms during the renovation, donors, groups

of interior designers, and BHFAC committee members adopted a room. Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon, who at the time served as the Chairman of the Committee on Historic Preservation of the American Institute of Interior Designers (A.I.D), and her committee, designed both the drawing rooms and the dining room..⁴⁴ Mrs. Lenygon's committee consisted of Mrs. McClusky and Mr. Stephen Jussel. Her committee became involved with the Blair House project not long after their work on the Library in the White House. Mrs. Lenygon had worked very closely with Mrs. Kennedy and her committee during the White House renovation. Thus, she served as the appropriate fit to help Mrs. Duke oversee the projects at hand. Following the BHFAC's first meeting in April of 1963, another meeting was held on May 13, 1963 which served to seek out individuals deemed appropriate to oversee the Blair House renovation. Mrs. Lenygon, Mr. Stephen Jussel, Mrs. John Sherman Cooper (a BHFAC member), Mrs. Wilroy, and Mrs. R. C. Calenberg (Executive Secretary of the BHFAC), were all a part of this meeting.⁴⁵ After the meeting and correspondence exchange between Washington, D.C. and New York, where a large number of the designers and consultants were based, Mrs. Lenygon accepted the role to oversee the renovation of a majority of the first floor rooms as well as few rooms on the second floor. However, she primarily focused on the work within the drawings rooms and dining rooms.

⁴⁴ "Department of State For the Press Caution - Future Release (Announcement of Blair House Reopening)" (Blair House, U.S. Department of State, January 9, 1964), All in BHFAC Records 1961-1969, document in "Blair House Fine Arts Committee," Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

⁴⁵ Duke, "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee, April 16, 1963."

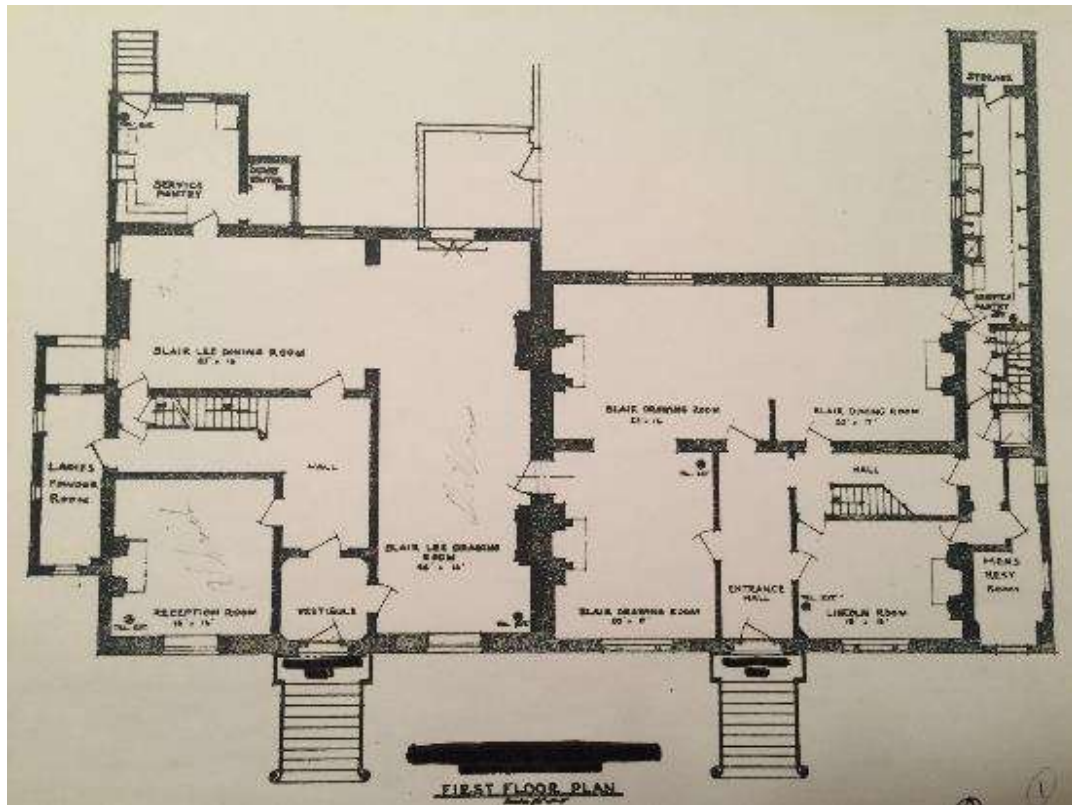


Figure 6 The President's Guest House, First Floor Plan. Image has light pencil marks indicating particular donors responsible for individual rooms within the complex. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

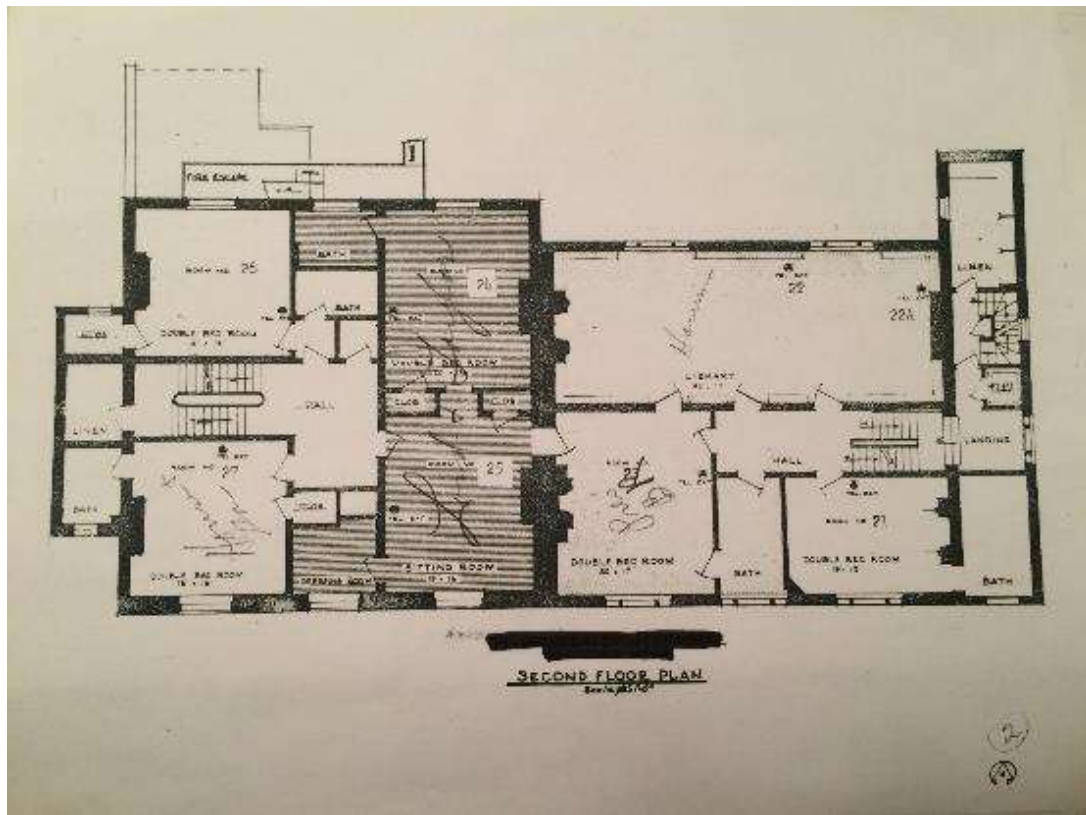


Figure 7 The President's Guest House, Second Floor Plan. Image has light pencil marks indicating particular donors responsible for individual rooms within the complex. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

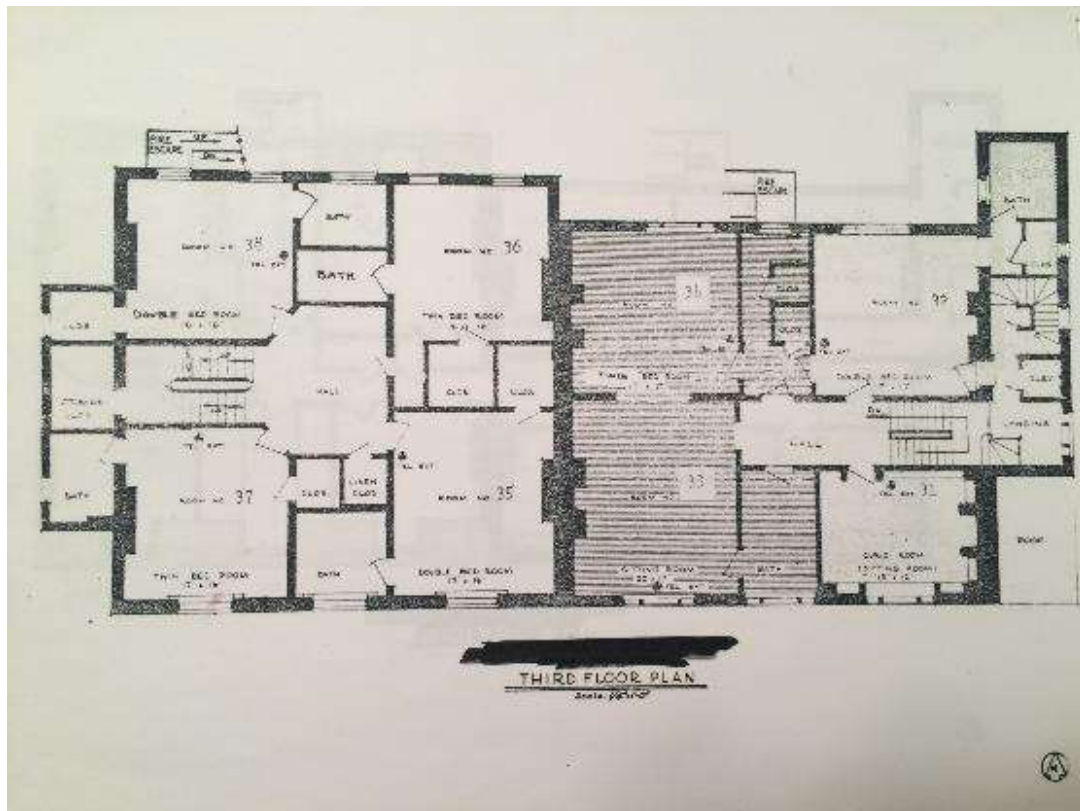


Figure 8 The President's Guest House, Third Floor Plan. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

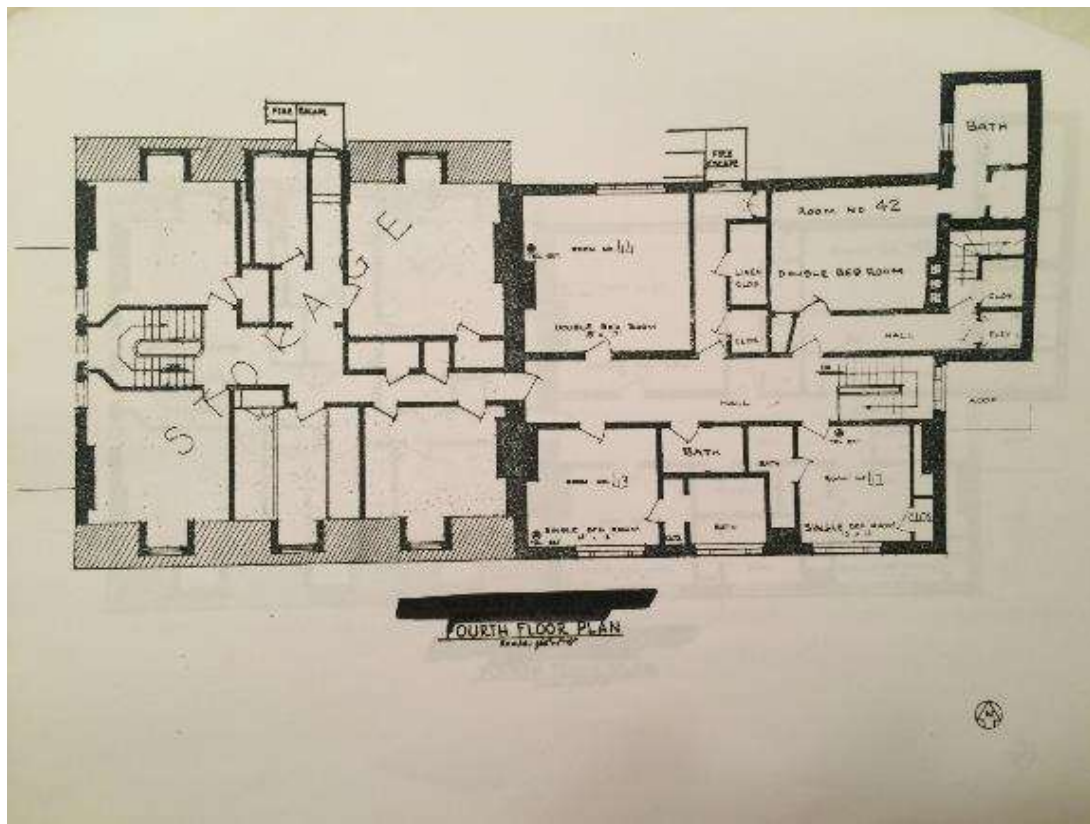


Figure 9 The President's Guest House, Fourth Floor Plan. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 10 Blair House Rear Drawing Room. 2008. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 11 Blair House Front Drawing Room. 2014. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.

Out of all the rooms renovated in the house between the summer of 1963 and the fall of 1964, the Blair drawing rooms and dining room received the least amount of extensive work. Mrs. Duke and Mrs. Lenygon sought to only repaint, reupholster furniture, and add new draperies. Though many pieces of furniture left and others added, the primary focus brought new and fresh fabrics, representing traditional design and elegance. Within a letter to Mrs. Lenygon from Mrs. Duke on August 20, 1963, she reminded Mrs. Lenygon of the concept to use yellows and blues as the color scheme for the drawing rooms.⁴⁶ Colors such as those used at the White House came highly recommended. Apart from the former drab blue draperies used in the drawing rooms during the 1940s, ice blue served as an accent to hues of yellows (fig. 12). During the plans of the drawing rooms and dining room, Mrs. Lenygon wrote a letter to Mrs. Duke explaining the type of fabrics she wished to use. She cut out and taped fabric samples to the back of the letter (fig. 12, 13, 14). Mrs. Duke sent Mrs. Lenygon's letter and fabric samples to Mrs. Kennedy in the midst of the project. Based on her response letter on October 1, 1963, it appeared quite evident she had requested Mrs. Duke send her the samples. Mrs. Kennedy's sense of micromanagement surprised no individuals who worked with her. In a letter written to Mrs. Johnson on December 1, 1963, requesting her support of the Blair House renovation, she expressed to her Mrs. Duke "has a much nicer

⁴⁶ Robin C. L. Duke, "Letter from Mrs. Duke to Mrs. Lenygon," August 20, 1963, All in BHFAC Records 1961-1969, document in Committee Members Files, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

character than I do and is much less autocratic...she lets everyone speak!”⁴⁷ Knowing Mrs. Kennedy’s insistence to be involved, her October 1, 1963 letter stated,

“The reason I wanted to see the samples was because we had the most terrible time here [at the White House] with Mrs. Lenygon in the Library. We had to do over so many things once we finally got her out of the place. I just didn’t seem up to it. I am sure she will be much better for you.”⁴⁸

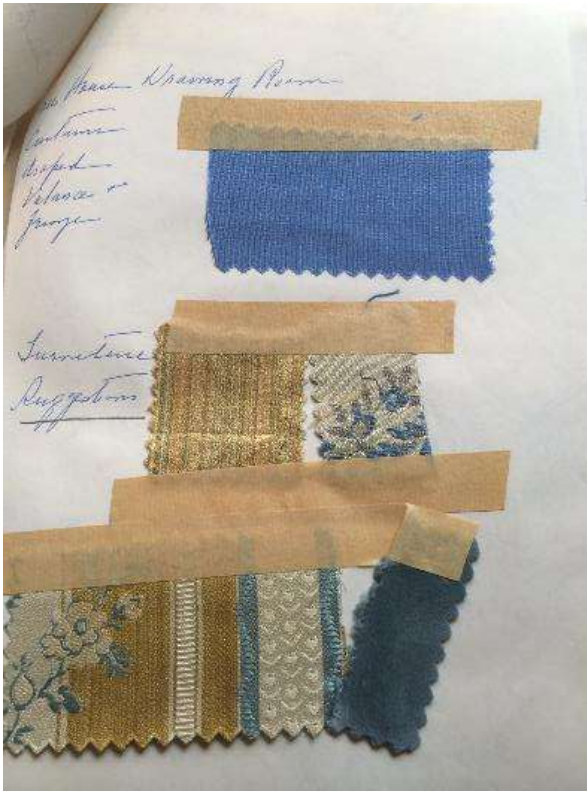


Figure 12 Letter from Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon, F.A.I.D. to Mrs. Robin Chandler Duke. Ca. 1963. Letter includes taped samples of fabrics and color choices for the renovation of multiple rooms in Blair House. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

⁴⁷ Jacqueline Kennedy, “Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Johnson,” December 1, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Kennedy, “Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding the Interior Design of Blair House),” October 1, 1963, All in BHFAC Records 1961-1969, copy of document in Committee Members Files, folder “Mrs. John F. Kennedy,” Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State, 1.

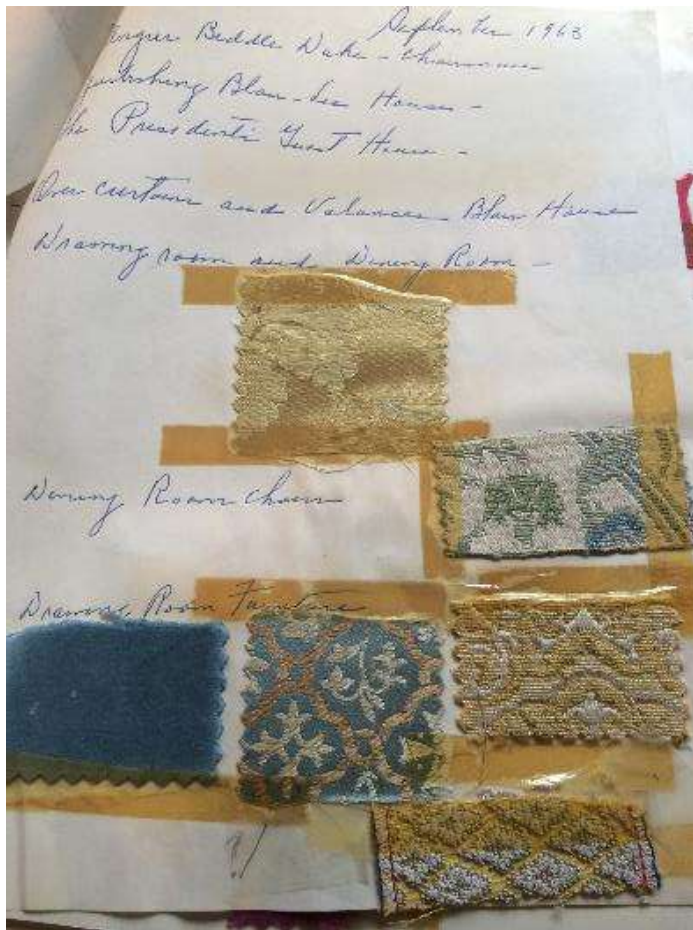


Figure 13 Letter from Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon, F.A.I.D. to Mrs. Robin Chandler Duke. Ca. 1963. Letter includes taped samples of fabrics and color choices for the renovation of multiple rooms in Blair House. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

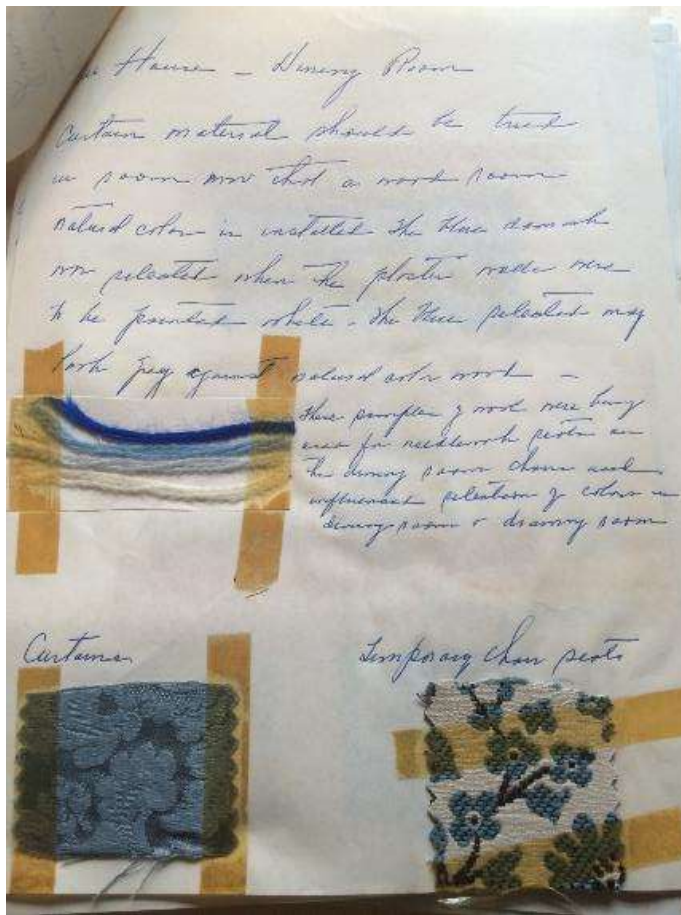


Figure 14 Letter from Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon, F.A.I.D. to Mrs. Robin Chandler Duke. Ca. 1963. Letter includes taped samples of fabrics and color choices for the renovation of multiple rooms in Blair House. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Mrs. Kennedy explained within the letter she had looked over the swatches and marked "X" on the samples she did not find appropriate.⁴⁹ Seeing she had not marked an "X" on the color pallets for the drawing rooms and dining room samples, it is assumed she approved the colors (fig. 12, 13, 14). Though she did not disapprove of the ice blue color for the draperies in the drawing rooms, she made a point to express her concern in using solid taffeta as the fabric. In her words, she stated,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1.

I think the Drawing Room curtain material, that Taffeta, isn't heavy enough to stand up well, and will end up looking like the curtains did in the Queen's Room [at the White House] when we got here; just limp. The color is so pretty – but, maybe, you can get a better quality Taffeta.”⁵⁰

After stating her opinions, she assured Mrs. Duke she had no intention to be difficult. She addressed her assurance in an apologetic manner. Mrs. Kennedy simply said, “please forgive me and don't bother to make any fuss over it.”⁵¹ This letter indicates Mrs. Kennedy quickly learned from individuals such as Ronald Tree, a BHFAC member and husband of Marietta Tree (who served as President Kennedy's Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights), and Stéphane Boudin that the use of damasks patterned draperies were always the best solution for a traditional space. She expressed to Mrs. Duke to seek out the council of both Roland Tree and Stepane Boudin when choosing the fabrics. Though Mrs. Lenygon had already chosen and recommended the solid ice blue taffeta for the drapes in the drawing rooms, the damask yellow fabric selected for the adjacent dining room was used in the drawing rooms (fig. 15, 16). It seemed Mrs. Kennedy's reinforcement of using the yellow damask patterned drapes ultimately turned out to be the final decision. Yellow and blue, as seen in both the East Room, Yellow Oval Room, and Blue Room at the White House became the popular uses of color familiar to Mrs. Kennedy. Thus, it was no surprise the Blair drawing rooms and dining room were “all given pale yellow walls with a faintly green cast. Moldings [were] ivory, and the window draperies are yellow gold.”⁵² One of the few color photographs of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1.

⁵² “The New Blair House,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 10, 1964, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

the Blair drawing room during the Kennedy renovation appeared in the Washington Post in 1964 (fig. 17). Within the photograph, it is evident blue and golden yellow fabrics were upholstered on the original Blair family furniture.



Figure 15 Blair Drawing Room, Ca. 1964. Interior designed by Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 16 Blair Rear Drawing Room, Ca. 1964. Interior designed by Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

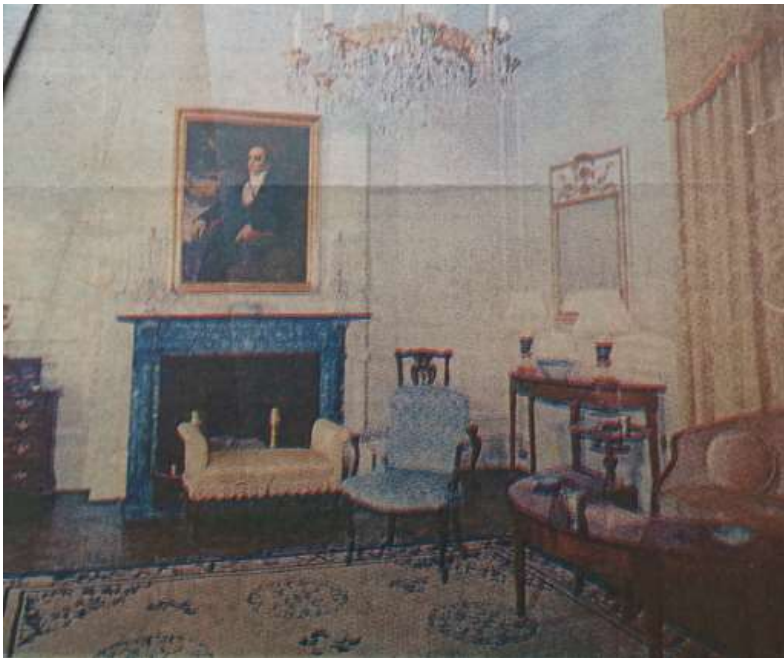


Figure 17 Blair Rear Drawing Room, Ca. 1964. Interior designed by Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon. Imaged appeared in the *Washington Post* on May 20, 1964. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

The valances in the space were shaped in an English style. A more traditional and federal theme, reflective of the late eighteenth century, quickly set in place. This late eighteenth-century theme stripped the space of its former nineteenth-century Victorian aesthetic partially created by Mrs. Gladys Miller in the 1940s (fig. 18, 19). Mrs. Lenygon removed the large Victorian mantle mirrors and placed elsewhere.⁵³ According to Mrs. Lenygon, the dining room needed the rug changed, the Sheraton- style china cabinet (once used in the Lee Dining Room) removed, and a screen for privacy added.⁵⁴ As for the drawing rooms, she specified “two small settees for [the] mantel[s] and two chairs; screen between Front Reception Room and rear section; William & Mary chest of drawers (GOOD) to be removed; use simple Hepplewhite and Sheraton furnishings in Drawing Room.”⁵⁵ As with most of the “traditional” design development among Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Duke, designers, and committee members, a special interest in the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary America and President Montrose’s French influence on the White House grew high in popularity. An association between the Kennedy’s modern image and their “traditional” upbringing developed quite an important role within the restoration of both the White House and Blair House. Creating spaces reflective of history and historic design provided the individuals who occupied them with a highly cultured and educated status. Author Sally Bedell Smith expressed Mrs. Kennedy’s life aesthetic when she stated, “Jackie had grown up in an atmosphere of understood elegance

⁵³ Jeannette Lenygon, “Letter from Mrs. Lenygon to Mrs. Duke,” July 2, 1963, All in BHFAC Records 1961-1969, document in Committee Members Files, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

in her family homes, Merrywood in suburban McLean, Virginia and Hammersmith Farm in Newport. Good taste streamed in Jackie's bloodstream, along with a basic knowledge of historic periods in the decorative arts."⁵⁶ As with Mrs. Lenygon's suggested use of all things Hepplewhite and Sheraton, an established aesthetic of "traditional" furnishings was critical in the drawing rooms and dining room.



Figure 18 Blair House Front Drawing Room. Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁶ Sally Bedell Smith, *Grace and Power* (New York: Random House, 2004), 21.



Figure 19 Blair House Front and Rear Drawing Room. Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

After rugs, draperies, fabrics, and paint colors were selected and installed, historic objects were arranged. The majority of the furnishings used in the drawing rooms and dining room had already existed within the Blair family collection of antiques. Portraiture hung in place of the Victorian nineteenth-century mantel mirrors. On loan from the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at the U.S. Department of State, portraits of Secretary of State Daniel Webster and British Foreign Minister Alexander Baring (the first Baron Ashburton) were chosen (fig. 10, 11). Artist George Peter Alexander Healy, known for his portraits of President Abraham Lincoln, painted both portraits as a coordinating pair in 1848. The paintings depict both leaders after the signing of the 1843 Webster-Ashburton Treaty. This treaty settled the border between Canada and the United States.

Within the artworks, Webster and Ashburton looks towards one another, each having one hand on the treaty. In hanging the portraits above the fireplaces in the adjacent Blair Front and Rear Drawings Rooms, a diplomatic message welcomed visitors. Immediately, visitors entering the parlors, just off the front entrance hall, visualized peace making between the United States and a foreign country. Aside from strategic and diplomatic art selections, the nineteenth-century portraiture enforced the “traditional” and federal aesthetic similar to the period rooms seen across the street. In comparison, the Green Room at the White House hung an official portrait of Benjamin Franklin by artist David Martin (fig. 20). Period rooms such as these, designed and arranged by individuals such as Henry Francis du Pont, reminisced of the early federal and Adam-inspired style. Aside from the existing furniture within the Blair house collection, the White House provided the Hepplewhite and Sheraton-style tables placed around the room. In her April 7, 1963 letter, Mrs. Kennedy explained to Mrs. Duke, “I will have lots of good furniture for you which you might want, that we haven’t been able to place...if you want them.”⁵⁷ It is still unclear if the White House provided these exact tables. The January 9, 1964 Department of State press release stated the drawing rooms provided “new additions [of] four tables which [were] on loan from the White House.”⁵⁸ Since modern photos show the same existing Sheraton-style demi lune top tables in the Blair Rear Drawing room, it is assumed the loaned White House tables consisted of those placed in front of the settees

⁵⁷ Jacqueline Kennedy, “Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding Mrs. Kennedy’s Involvement with the Blair House Restoration),” April 7, 1963, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, 2.

⁵⁸ “Department of State For the Press Caution - Future Release (Announcement of Blair House Reopening),” January 9, 1964.

for use of tea and coffee (fig. 10). Today, two of the most important pieces within the collection and used in the Blair Rear Drawing Room are two eighteenth-century open arm Georgian chairs (fig. 21). Though it is uncertain if these two arm chairs were used in the drawing rooms during the early 1960s, they received reupholstering during the Kennedy Blair House renovation. Both were collected prior to the Kennedy Blair house projects. One of the chairs is recorded as possibly being acquired by Gist Blair during his travels.⁵⁹ The other is thought to have been purchased either by the government during the Gladys Miller renovation or by Camilla Moody Payne, another designer who worked on Blair House after Gladys Miller.⁶⁰ Both of these Georgian and Chippendale-style chairs had their original needlepoint upholstery replaced with duplicated copies. Since their original needlework remained quite fragile and in great need of conservation, the British company, Arthur H. Lee & Sons replicated its needlepoint upholstery.⁶¹ The object records for these chairs indicate their replicated needlepoint upholstery was commissioned by Camilla Moody Payne and before the Kennedy era.⁶² Other recent information indicates Mrs. Kennedy's involvement with the chairs. According to communication between curators at the White House and Blair House, a British newspaper article, written on December 7, 1963, stated,

“Mrs. Kennedy sent the old covers to be repaired. Experts at the factory decided they were repair and suggested instead that replicas should be prepared by the company. This was agreed to and the new covers have

⁵⁹ Candace Shireman, “Object File #BH-1945.0076,” n.d., Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

⁶⁰ Candace Shireman, “Object File #BH-1945.0077,” n.d., Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

⁶¹ Shireman, “Object File #BH-1945.0076.”

⁶² Ibid.

now been sent to America. The chairs – given a new lease of life – will be placed in the White House the adjoining Blair House...”⁶³

In supporting Mrs. Kennedy’s involvement with the replicated needlepoint upholstery, correspondence between Blair House administrative staffers on April 25, 1963 listed the final amount due for the Arthur H. Lee & Sons needlepoint covers.⁶⁴ Knowing the needlepoint covers were finished in April of 1963 helps to suggest their association with the Kennedy era. This association further strengthened the goal in creating “traditional” spaces connected aesthetically with the White House.



Figure 20 Green Room, White House. January 24, 1963. View of the Green Room. White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

⁶³ “White House Curator in an Email to Candace Shireman, Curator of Blair House,” May 13, 2009.

⁶⁴ Katherine Laird, “Enclosed Bill from Arthur H. Lee & Sons,” April 25, 1963, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 21 Open Arm Chairs with Arthur H. Lee, Inc. needlework upholstery. Ca. 1760, 1962. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photos by John Botello.

To balance these “traditional” American spaces, the designers incorporated touches of Asian decorative arts. Presumably incorporated to showcase a diplomatic appreciation for foreign decorative arts or a cultured American persona, Chinese lacquer screens were donated in 1963 for use in the Blair Dining Room. The folding Chinese “Coromandel” screen created privacy in the northeast corner of the dining room in front of the door (fig. 22). A similar lacquer “Coromandel” screen was used in the White House on the second-floor Center Hall. They positioned them on either side of the hall’s central doorway (fig. 23). Just as the Blair Dining Room screen created an eclectic aesthetic among the antique eighteenth-century mahogany dining set, the White House screen also provided the same feel among the Sheraton, Adams, and Hepplewhite furniture (fig. 24). These “cultural” pieces served as complimentary objects amongst the sea of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Americana.



Figure 22 Blair Dining Room. Ca. 1964. Interior designed by Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 23 Second-Floor Center Hall, White House. August 28, 1963. View of the second-floor Center Hall (Central Hall). White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.



Figure 24 Blair Dining Room. Ca. 1964. Interior designed by Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Furnishings, artwork, and decorative arts reflecting our nation's history and founding fathers resurged once again since the colonial revival era and the 1920s "isolationism following the first World War."⁶⁵ The resurgence and interest in early America and national pride was expected with a new President who "[emitted] a [liberator] aura...[similar to that of] King Arthur (good government), Sir Lancelot (youthful romantic ardor), and Galahad, the holiest of knights."⁶⁶

During the refurbishment of the Blair drawing rooms and dining room, plans and work had also begun on the Lee Dining Room, Lee Drawing Room and the President's Study, known today as the Truman Study. The President's Study served as the official office to President Truman during the renovation of the White House from 1948 to 1952. As the fall of 1963 progressed, the month of November consisted of multiple projects and one of our country's greatest tragedies. On November 22, 1963, as the Blair House renovation proceeded, President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy traveled to Dallas, Texas. By mid-day, the President Kennedy had been assassinated. Mrs. Wilroy, Blair House manager, recalled the moment she discovered the shocking news. Shortly after lunch, Mrs. Wilroy, working in her office, and managing the construction projects taking place at Blair House, received a call from a family member. Her family said, "I can't believe the President is dead."⁶⁷ Within a short period of time, Mrs. Wilroy began making arrangements for Blair House to be "temporarily" decent in appearance for use by Kennedy friends and family. The days following the death of President Kennedy were

⁶⁵ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 90.

⁶⁶ Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images*, 97.

⁶⁷ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 114.

busy with funeral arrangements at Blair House, guest arrivals, planning of private gatherings, and the transition from one president to another. As the holidays approached, Mrs. Duke continued to pour over of a variety of color samples in the midst of choosing stain colors for the woodwork in the house.⁶⁸ Though Mrs. Duke and Blair House staff unrelentingly coped with the mourning of President Kennedy, they continued the work at hand. By early December, Mrs. Lyndon b. Johnson, now First Lady, came to the house to see the progress made. After lunch with Mrs. Duke, she strolled through a guided tour of the house, where she saw an almost complete Lee Drawing Room and Lee Dining Room.⁶⁹ Mrs. Johnson now served as the honorary chairman of the BHFAC. Though she concentrated more on her beautification of the American landscape, she remained devoted and supportive of the Blair House renovation. In late December, not long after the new first lady's walkthrough, the new White House Social Secretary Mrs. Bess Abell had lunch with Mrs. Wilroy and discussed the renovation project.⁷⁰ After their talk, Bess Abell provided Mrs. Wilroy with a photograph of President and Mrs. Johnson. The photograph replaced the framed photograph of the Kennedys in the Blair drawing room.⁷¹ To Mrs. Wilroy, "the arrival of the Johnson photo marked the beginning of Lyndon Baines Johnson's administration...and the end of the Kennedy era."⁷²

Mrs. Johnson understood and respected all the hard work at Blair House. She felt very sensitive to the projects and agendas which had been set forth by Mrs. Kennedy.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 121.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁷¹ Ibid., 123.

⁷² Ibid., 123.

After all, Mrs. Johnson's transition into the White House was not as glamorous and celebratory as it had been for most first ladies. Mrs. Johnson remained very respectful and gracious to Mrs. Kennedy. In 2014, Bess Abell stated in a C-SPAN interview Mrs. Johnson expressed to several people, "there is not a lot of things I can do for Mrs. Kennedy, but at least I can serve her convenience."⁷³ With this, Mrs. Johnson kindly allowed Mrs. Kennedy as much time as she needed to officially leave the White House. Mrs. Kennedy officially moved out of the White House on December 6, 1963. Though she walked away from the White House, her passion for it and Blair House remained steady. Her concern for the Blair House renovation persisted in letters both to Mrs. Johnson and Henry Francis du Pont. Less than two months before the assassination, Mrs. Kennedy wrote to du Pont, "now I worry about the President's guest house...[the] peeling walls, wire coat hangers, stuffed furniture and ghastly television set. Guests at Blair House "have probably just slept in gilded beds and eaten off an Ivan the Terrible gold-plated plate in the Kremlin."⁷⁴ Mrs. Kennedy feared foreign heads of state walking across the street from the White House only to find "quite shocking...shabby rooms." By December, just days before she moved out of the White House, she expressed in a letter to Mrs. Johnson her concern of the BHFAC being "absolutely bogged down" with the renovation and planning.⁷⁵ Even during the midst of all devastation in America, Mrs. Kennedy expressed the importance in transforming the President's guest house into a

⁷³ "Panel Discussion on the Role of the First Lady," *C-SPAN.org*, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?319588-1/panel-discussion-role-first-lady>.

⁷⁴ Jacqueline Kennedy, "Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mr. Henry Francis Du Pont," September 20, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

⁷⁵ Kennedy, "Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Johnson."

residence reflective of her established diplomatic and hospitable code. Even after President Kennedy's death, Mrs. Kennedy continued to express the same opinion of reporter Pat Saltonstall who stated, "diplomatically speaking[,] Blair House [was] not quite fit for kings."⁷⁶

Lee Dining Room

By January of 1964, the first floor of Blair House and Blair-Lee House had made much progress. On January 9, 1964, Mrs. Johnson held a reception at Blair House for "members of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee and donors to the project, as well as members of the working staff or contractors, craftsmen, painters and builders who participated in the restoration."⁷⁷ By the time of the reception, the Blair drawing rooms and dining room were complete. The Lee Dining Room, adjacent the Lee Drawing Room, and the President's Study, located off the front entrance hall of Lee House remained partially completed (fig. 6). Lee Dining Room, underwent one of the most extreme transformations during the Blair House renovation.

Before the Lee Dining Room transformed into the handsome eighteenth-century Georgian paneled room it is today, it still showed evidence of its former 1940s décor by Gladys Miller (fig. 25, 26). Most of Gladys Miller's designs for Blair House were somewhat modest in comparison to the 1940s height of the Hollywood regency style and

⁷⁶ Pat Saltonstall, "Dipolmatically Speaking: Blair House Not Quite Fit For Kings," *The Sunday Star*, June 9, 1963, sec. Society-Home.

⁷⁷ "Department of State For the Press Caution - Future Release (Announcement of Blair House Reopening)" (U.S. Department of State, January 9, 1964), Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

influence from popular designers such as Dorothy Draper.⁷⁸ However, out of all the rooms designed by Gladys Miller, the Lee Dining Room represented the most dramatic of the 1940s aesthetic. Complete with a mirrored wall, dogwood patterned and scenic wallpaper, floor lamps, (Paterson Fabric, Inc.) gold draperies, (F. Schumacher & Co.) velvet upholstery, and light brown broadloom carpeting, the space was sprinkled with elements popular to the Hollywood regency panache (Fig. 27).⁷⁹ Elements such as mirrored walls and mirrored architectural elements could be found in spaces such as those designed by Dorothy Draper (fig. 28). As with other iconic and stylish interiors of the era, Gladys Miller used mirrored glass to create accent walls in both the Lee Dining Room and the President's Study. She, like many designers, mixed trends of the 1940s with elements of federal and traditional American design. Elements of the federal and traditional spirit were incorporated through the use of reproduction eighteenth-century furniture. The breakfront, chairs, and table were all reproductions reminiscent of eighteenth-century English patterns. In accordance to her floor plan, Gladys Miller placed the breakfront and side table along the walls with the dining suite situated in the center of the room (fig. 29). All the furniture pieces were reproductions of Chippendale and

⁷⁸ Dorothy Draper was a leading interior designers during the 1940s. Dorothy Draper's book *Decorating is Fun!: How to be Your Own Decorator* (New York: Pointed Leaf Press, 2007) was originally published in 1939 and provided examples of interior design trends of the era. Her whimsical, colorful, heavily patterned fabrics, and mirrored architectural elements were on the extreme side of national décor. Thus, it was no surprise to see a designer such as Gladys Miller taking modified ideas and concepts from Dorothy Draper.

⁷⁹ Gladys Miller, "From: Gladys Miller, B.B.A. Consultant. 535 Fifth Ave. N.Y.C. 12/3/43, Blair Lee House," December 3, 1943, Blair-Lee: 1944 Decoration Fabrics Samples, Furniture – Gladys Miller Notebook #6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Sheratons designs (fig. 30, 31). Though the breakfront later moved to another space during the 1960s, both the Sheraton-style table and Chippendale-style chairs were still used in the Lee Dining Room after the renovation in 1963.



Figure 25 Lee Dining Room. Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Blair-Lee Plans/Specifications 1944 – Gladys Miller Notebook #2, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 26 Lee Dining Room. Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Blair-Lee Plans/Specifications 1944 – Gladys Miller Notebook #2, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

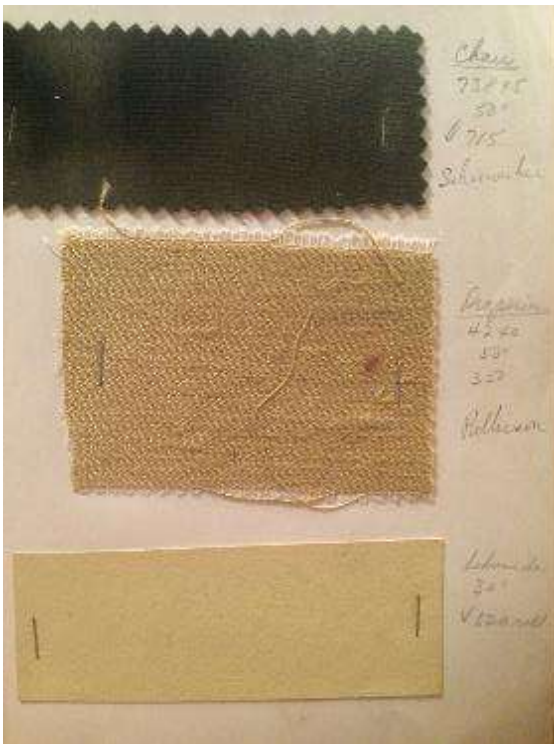


Figure 27 Selected fabrics for Lee Dining Room. Ca. 1944. Blair-Lee: 1944 Decoration Fabrics Samples, Furniture – Gladys Miller Notebook #6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 28 Camellia House in the Drake Hotel, Chicago, IL. Ca. 1945. Interior designed by Dorothy Draper. The Charleton Varney Design Group.

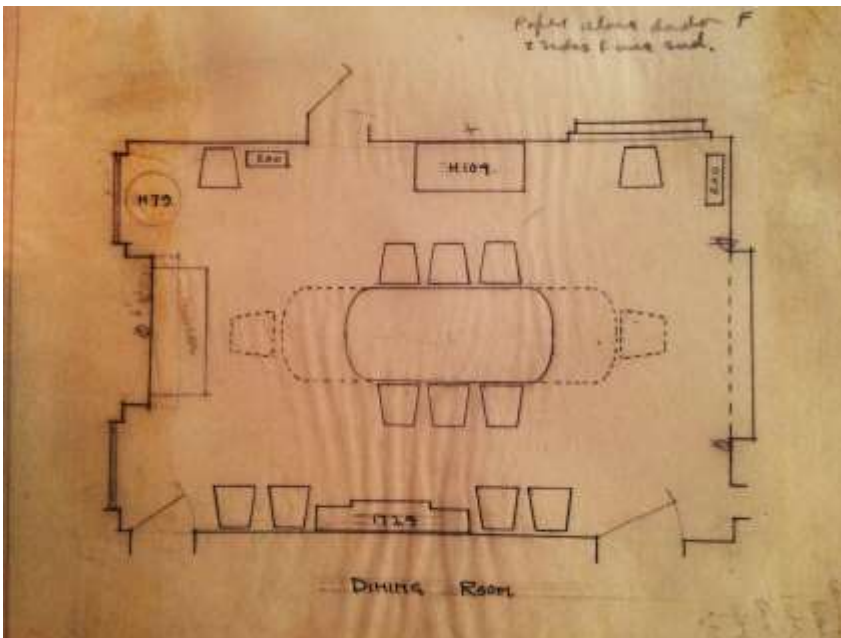


Figure 29 Hand-drafted floor plan of Lee Dining Room. Ca. 1944. Blair-Lee: 1944 Decoration Fabrics Samples, Furniture – Gladys Miller Notebook #6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 30 Lee Dining Room two –part table with pair of Sheraton style pedestal legs. Ca. 1944. Blair-Lee: 1944 Decoration Fabrics Samples, Furniture – Gladys Miller Notebook #6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 31 Lee Dining Room chairs. Chairs produced by Baker Furniture Ca. 1944. Blair-Lee: 1944 Decoration Fabrics Samples, Furniture – Gladys Miller Notebook #6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Apart from the table and dining chairs used in the 1940s era Lee Dining Room, everything else in the space dramatically changed. This change was due to in part to the eighteenth-century Georgian paneling donated to Blair House in 1964 by the Frelinghuysen family (fig. 32, 33). The Frelinghuysen family members responsible for the donation of the historic paneling included the three brothers Congressman Peter Frelinghuysen, Mr. George Frelinghuysen, and Mr. Harry Frelinghuysen.⁸⁰ The Frelinghuysen brothers donated the paneling in memory of their parents Mr. and Mrs. P.H.B. Frelinghuysen. According to the paneling's Blair House records, it "originally [came] from an English country home; purchased from that home and installed by Mr. and Mrs. P.H.B. Frelinghuysen in their own home Morristown, New Jersey home."⁸¹ William Clayton, the former Under Secretary of State, proved the funding used for the transportation and installation of the paneling. In addition to the Frelinghuysen's gift of the historic paneling, they also gave an English eighteenth-century fireplace mantel equip with the traditional elements of scroll work, a central carved urn, interlacing flora and fauna, and finials (fig. 34). The installation of the paneling and the fireplace in the Lee Dining Room contributed heavily to the mid-century's appreciation and fascination with period rooms, popular with major museum institutions, collectors, and the White House. During the room's early phases of installation and redecoration in early 1964, Mrs. Eleanor Brown of McMillen, Inc. of New York oversaw a majority of the work on the

⁸⁰ "Department of State For the Press Caution - Future Release (Announcement of Blair House Reopening)," January 9, 1964.

⁸¹ Candace Shireman, "Object File #BH-1964.0250.A," n.d., Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

room and the Lee Drawing Room. As a contemporary of Dorothy Draper, Mrs. McMillen and Dorothy Draper's cousin Sister Parish, who would assist with the design of room in the Kennedy White House, 'focused their considerable skills and often commanding social positions on defining the antiques-laden look of upper-crust residential interiors along the eastern seaboard.'⁸² After the installation of the architectural fragments, they painted them white to brighten the room. Both white and blue were used as the two primary colors in the Lee Dining Room. Hues of whites, creams, and royal blue were thematic in the space and inspired by the blue and white colors of the "Canton" export porcelain (fig. 35, 36).⁸³ Mrs. Edgar W. Garbisch donated another royal blue and cream colored porcelain dining set to Blair House during the renovation. Between the blue and white porcelain, a Venetian mirror with blue glass, and the blue leaves needlepointed on the dining chair seats, a favorite color palate of Mrs. Kennedy developed into a reality. The Lee Dining Room underwent its renovation during the fall of 1963 and into the beginning of 1964. During November of 1963, just weeks before the assassination of President Kennedy, Stéphane Boudin had begun working on plans to update the First Lady's bedroom (Fig. 37, 38). These updates incorporated more elegant silk window treatments and a new headboard.⁸⁴ Fine blue silks and fabrics would have been

⁸² Mitchell Owens, "Living Large: The Brash, Bodacious Hotels of Dorothy Draper," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 25 (2005): 254–87, 255. Throughout this thesis, mention of Eleanor Brown McMillen and Sister Parish's work on the White House and Blair House provide vivid examples of interiors designed with more of an antiquarian and federal look. This look was completely different from the bold and valiant work of Dorothy Draper, who specialized in commercial spaces within hotels and office buildings.

⁸³ Robin C. L. Duke, "Blair House," *House & Garden*, January 1965, 93.

⁸⁴ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 202.

implemented. The First Lady's bedroom had already been decorated in a blue and white color scheme by Sister Parish complete with white walls, blue draperies, white damask, and blue and white Chinese porcelain. Both Mrs. Kennedy's bedroom and her private dressing room, equip with a built in trompe l'oeil wardrobe, were set in tones of blue and white (fig. 39). Though Mrs. Kennedy sought "traditional" period spaces most important to individuals such as Henry Francis du Pont, she could not help incorporating elements of French design. Within her dressing room, the trompe l'oeil wardrobe "was painted by Paris-based artist Pierre-Marie Rudelle—'Artiste Peintre Décorateur'—to represent important events in the life of the First Lady (fig. 40)."⁸⁵ The important elements, relating to Mrs. Kennedy, consisted of President Kennedy's published book (*Profiles in Courage* and *Why England Slept*), pictures of family, paintings by Fulco di Verdura and Phillippe Julian, sculptures, and Fabergé clocks.⁸⁶ The idea of such a wardrobe came from a close friend to the Kennedys, Mrs. Rachel Lambert Mellon.⁸⁷ The Kennedy's involved Mrs. Mellon with many White House projects. As an amateur landscape designer, she and landscape architect Perry H. Wheeler redesigned the Rose Garden outside the Oval Office alongside the West Wing. Mrs. Mellon also had trompe l'oeil cabinetry inside her greenhouse at her home in Upperville, Virginia (fig. 41). Her taste and style heavily influenced Mrs. Kennedy's personal life and taste.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 204.

⁸⁶ Smith, *Grace and Power*, 302.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 302.



Figure 32 Lee Dining Room, Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in House & Garden magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 33 Lee Dining Room stripped of furniture during structural repair. 2015. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.



Figure 34 Lee Dining Room fireplace mantel. 2015. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.

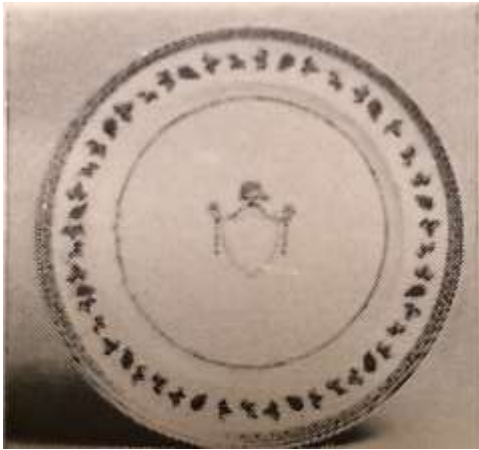


Figure 35 Blue and White “Canton” export porcelain. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 36 Lee Dining, Ca. 1964. Image appeared in *The Finest Rooms Rooms by America’s Great Decorators* in 1964. Lynes, Russell, William Baldwin, Rose Cumming, Marian Hall, Eleanor S. Brown, Henry Parish II, George Stacey, Anne Urquhart, and Michael Taylor. *The Finest Rooms by America’s Great Decorators*. New York: The Viking Press, 1964.



Figure 37 First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's Bedroom, White House. May 9, 1962. View of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's Bedroom. White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.



Figure 38 First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's Bedroom, White House. May 9, 1962. View of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's Bedroom. White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.



Figure 39 First Lady's Dressing Room, August 28, 1963. View of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's dressing room, White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.



Figure 40 First Lady's Dressing Room, August 28, 1963. View of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's dressing room, White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.



Figure 41 Greenhouse Interiors. Home of Rachel Lambert Mellon, Oak Spring Residence, Upper Ville, Virginia. Artist Fernand Renard painted the trompe l'oeil designs on the cabinetry. Photography by Horst P. Horst/courtesy of Condé Nast Archive.

Mrs. Kennedy's and Boudin's love for all things blue and white inspired the colors integration in the Blue Room of the White House (fig. 42). Aside from Mrs. Kennedy's preference for the color blue, she and her decorators had researched President Monroe's period at the White House and use of the blue upholstered Bellangé furniture. Monroe's French influence within the White House led Boudin and Mrs. Kennedy to create somewhat of a Parisian space. Though du Pont constantly found himself frustrated with the French inspired décor of the Blue Room, "no other White House room better represented the ambitions of the President and First Lady; the Blue Room served as the definitive backdrop for the Kennedy Presidency."⁸⁸ Mrs. Kennedy's popularized blue and

⁸⁸ Ibid, 101.

white spaces, sometimes reflective of French design, were also implemented at Blair House. During the time of the assassination and frequent communication among Blair House and White House committee members and designers, Lee Dining Room underwent its alterations and renovation. There was a strong influence of White House color schemes and themes being mimicked at Blair House.



Figure 42 Blue Room, White House. June 4, 1963. View of the Blue Room of the White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

The Lee Dining Room existed both as a space reflective of Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnson. Though Mrs. Kennedy committed herself to developing American period

spaces, she still drove and initiated a style inspired by European taste.⁸⁹ Mrs. Johnson on the other hand, seemed to be more concerned with all things American and the American landscape. Their difference in taste became evident in the smallest details. After Mrs. Kennedy left the White House, she advised Mrs. Johnson “not to employ an American company to manufacture her china. ‘The results always looked more like hotel china,’ [Mrs. Kennedy] told her in one letter. In this matter, [Mrs. Johnson] ignored Mrs. Kennedy’s advice...and chose a pattern with native wildflower designs – her own signature – and insisted it be made by an American firm.”⁹⁰ Mrs. Johnson continued Mrs. Kennedy’s restoration committees both at the White House and Blair House. Her continuation and involvement of such committees remained heavily encouraged by President Johnson who “assured [Mrs. Kennedy] the work would go on.”⁹¹ Their influence was visible in the Lee Dining through both colors of blue and white and the needlepoint project of the dining room chairs (fig. 43, 44).

⁸⁹ In addition to James Abbott and Elaine Rices’ extensive work on the Kennedy White House interiors, James Abbott’s college thesis titled “Restoration: Twenty-Five Years of Interpretation” (Vassar College, 1986) provides additional information pertaining to the American versus the European aesthetic of the White House interiors. His thesis incorporates a lot of the interpretive ideas and plans of Clement Conger.

⁹⁰ Jan Jarboe Russell, *Lady Bird: A Biography of Mrs. Johnson* (Scribner, 1999), 274.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 229.



Figure 43 Needlework seat cover. Ca. 1963-1964. This pattern was possibly designed by Robert Mazaltov and Son and inspired by the Lowestoft porcelain pattern from the Blair family collection. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.



Figure 44 Needlework seat cover, Ca. 1963-1964. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.

The dining table and set of eighteen chairs were reproductions of Sheraton and Chippendale designs produced circa 1940 by Baker Furniture Co. The set of mahogany chairs in particular served as key players in the complete transformation of the Lee Dining Room. Aside from their role in transforming the Lee Dining room into a period appropriate masterpiece, these chairs represent the Kennedy and Johnson era of women's roles in both the domestic sphere and the national stage for historic preservation and the arts. In early 1964, after the Lee Dining Room Georgian paneling installation, the State Department issued a statement within their press release which explained,

“the chairs in the Lee Dining Room will be covered in needlepoint from a design which was taken from the Lowestoft porcelain that has been in the Blair since the family resided there. The wives of Cabinet Members and other distinguished women are working on the needlepoint which should be finished by September 1964. Mrs. W. Willard Wirt, wife of the Secretary of Labor, is supervising this program.”⁹²

The needlepoint pattern, possibly designed by Robert Mazaltov and Son, a New York based needlepoint company, was inspired by the Lowestoft porcelain. The design consists of vines and grape leaves intertwined in the shape of a wreath. Hues of blues were used for the wreath design on top of a cream background. Since each chair's needlepointed seat looked identical, a brass plate was affixed underneath with the engraved name of the wife responsible for the needlepointed seat.⁹³

The task of needlepointing chair covers for the Lee Dining Room presented itself as a project appropriate for the prominent wives of President Kennedy and President

⁹² “Department of State For the Press Caution - Future Release (Announcement of Blair House Reopening),” January 9, 1964.

⁹³ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 141.

Johnson's cabinet members. The nature of its suitability for the wives of the President's cabinet members was due in part to author Betty Friedan's concept of the "feminine mystic" of the early 1960s and their responsibility for historic preservation. The women assigned to the needlepoint project consisted of First Lady Claudia {Lady Bird} Johnson, wife of the President of the United States, Anne Celebrezze, wife of the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Mary Louise Day, wife of the Postmaster General, Phyllis Dillon, wife of the Secretary of the Treasury, Robin Chandler Duke, wife of the U.S. Chief of Protocol, Jane Freeman, wife of the Secretary of Agriculture, Martha Hodges, wife of the Secretary of Commerce, Ethel Kennedy, wife of the U.S. Attorney General, Marg McNamara, wife of the Secretary of Defense, Virginia Rusk, wife of the Secretary of State, Lee Udall, wife of the Secretary of the Interior, Jane Wirtz, wife of the Secretary of Labor, Sandra Goodwin, wife of the Speechwriter and Advisor to President Kennedy and President Johnson, Edith McCulloch, wife of the Chairman of the National Labor Relations Board, Jane Thompson, wife of U.S. Diplomat, Betsy Tyler, wife of the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ellie Israel, Mrs. James M. Nabrit, and Mary Weaver.⁹⁴

Though this type of domestic project signified what author Stephanie Coontz explains as the "chief purpose" for women of the early 1960s, it seemed to be viewed quite differently among the "white glove and Chanel" women associated with their

⁹⁴ "Blair House Fine Arts Committee Needlepoint Project," 1964, All in BHFAC Records 1961-1969, document in "Projects - Needlepoint (Mrs. Duke's Committee)" folder, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

husband's careers in politics. These intelligent women seemed to use their positions as prominent wives of politicians and leaders to accomplish more satisfying work in historic preservation. Like Mrs. Kennedy, these women were far more interested in making progress within a realm of history deemed appropriate for them to have interests. Apart from their expected "joy of being a part of [their] husband's preparation for a career,"⁹⁵ many of these woman worked to establish better functioning historic sites and spaces. Most interestingly, a majority of these high profile women did not physically needlepoint their own seat cover for the Lee Dining Room. According to a letter written by Mrs. Wirtz, the BHFAC committee member who led the needlepoint committee, to Mrs. Duke on September 29, 1964, she stated,

"With this letter I am enclosing a list of people who helped the Cabinet wives with their needlepoint and to whom you said you would like to send invitations to the October 22nd reception at Blair House. Jane Thompson says she does not know the name of the woman who took over her work, but that you have that one in your file. * The other omissions are the names of the women who helped Mrs. Johnson [with her needlepointed seat cover]. I've been in contact with Bess Abel, but it may take a few days to get an answer. When I get one, I shall pass it along to you."⁹⁶

This letter helps to provide evidence these particular women were far more interested in the concept of providing needlepoint work for the historic space rather than the actual process of needlepointing. In the same way the Mount Vernon Ladies Association found

⁹⁵ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 109.

⁹⁶ Jane Wirtz, "Letter from Mrs. Wirtz to Mrs. Duke," September 29, 1964, All in BHFAC Records 1961-1969, document in "Projects - Needlepoint (Mrs. Duke's Committee)" folder, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

a fascination with the shell pattern cushions needlepointed by Martha Washington, they themselves were not the women who constructed the cushions, instead they led the projects focused on their conservation and preservation. Studying traditional roles of homemakers in the colonial era seemed more nostalgic than appealing for some of these women, who were more interested in the subject matter than the skill itself.⁹⁷ However, their direction and involvement in historic preservation still did not separate them from their husband's identity. Even women not among the higher ranks of society but working in professional museum capacities still associated themselves with their husband's identities. In 1965, the media publically announced Dr. Helen Fede as the new curator of Blair House. Her announcement as curator was quite indicative of the era's view of working female professionals. On April 13, 1965, the *Evening Star* published an article titled "Blair House Has Woman Curator." The second paragraph of the article began by stating Dr. Fede works a "registrars too."⁹⁸ Before the article even addressed her background, it paralleled the title of the article by reiterating the shock of Dr. Fede becoming both a female curator and registrar. After stating the shock value, the author

⁹⁷ Martha Washington's needlepointed seat cover's e-catalog record at Mount Vernon can be accessed at <http://www.mountvernon.org/research-collections/collections-holdings/browse-the-museum-collections/object/w-2173/>. Primary researched material on women and historic preservation includes: Barbara J. Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham." *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (1990), Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York: Random House, 2009, Dubrow, Gail Lee and Jennifer B. Goodman, eds. *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, and Amy Boyce Osaki, "A 'Truly Feminine Employment': Sewing and the Early Nineteenth-Century Woman." *Winterthur Portfolio* 23, no. 4 (1988).

⁹⁸ "Blair House Has Woman Curator," *The Evening Star*, April 13, 1965, sec. B6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

comforted any concerns their readers might have by listing her credentials for the job.

However, the author carefully specified the credentials both earned and still in progress.

The article read,

“She brings impressive credentials to the post. For the past 11 years she has been curator of Mt. Vernon, where she also wrote booklets on its military equipment and its china. A native of Niagara Falls, N. Y., Mrs. Fede has completed all requirements but her dissertation toward a Ph.D. in history from Bryn Mawr. The dissertation – on the American Revolution – was interrupted, 18 years ago, by the birth of the first of her four children. Her husband Frank, is with the International Logistics Negotiations section of the Defense Department... Surrounded daily by genuine antiques, she returns home at night to an Alexandria home furnished with reproductions.”⁹⁹

After highlighting the fact of her unfinished dissertation, due to childbirth, the author reminds its readers she remains married to her husband with a respectable career. In the end, Dr. Fede is categorized among the career mothers who “return home at night.” The author makes no mistake in mentioning Dr. Fede is both a “woman” curator and a mother. Although Dr. Fede worked professionally in historic preservation and museums, she received no acknowledgment in the article as a professional separated from her duties at home.

Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnson oversaw and involved themselves in projects deemed appropriate for privileged housewives and working women. As nationally recognized female figures, they separated themselves from a role limited to “love[ing] and comfort[ing] their husbands” than most women.¹⁰⁰ Mrs. Kennedy, with her ultra-

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, 73.

feminine qualities and fashion, still exuded an intellectual charisma in the country. Susan Douglas, a media historian acknowledged Mrs. Kennedy as a woman

“doing her part to dismantle outdated gender stereotypes: ‘Jackie had these traditionally ‘masculine’ qualities – she was smart and loved intellectual pursuits, she was knowledgeable about history and the arts, she wore pants, and she had big feet – yet she was still completely feminine, a princess, a queen. She knew how to take charge, and yet she also knew how to be gracious and ornamental.’”¹⁰¹

Both Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnsons’ ceremonial roles in the renovation of Blair House held a great importance to them. They both knew the greater meaning tied to the selection of fabrics, furnishings, and china at places such as the White House and Blair House. These decisions affected the visual persona of the United States and dictate the comfort levels of foreigners. Some gender studies scholars associated their particular involvement with the White House and Blair House renovations as a nationalized version of the domesticated housewife decorating her husband’s home. However, Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnson were much more intelligent to understand the importance in shaping history and diplomatic hospitality.

Lee Drawing Room

Mrs. Kennedy’s immediate response to the Lee Drawing Room renovation conveyed nothing short of a warning as to the overall aesthetic goal of Blair House. As an extension of the Lee Dining Room, the Lee Drawing Room sits adjacent to the dining room and to the right of the Entrance Hall in Lee House (fig. 6, 45). In the fall of 1963, Lee Drawing Room was mentioned in correspondence between Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs.

¹⁰¹ Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images*, 104.

Duke. Within Mrs. Kennedy's letter to Mrs. Duke on October 1, 1963, she quite specially mentioned her opinions of the color scheme determined by Mrs. Lenygon for the Lee Drawing Room. Before the tragic event of November 1963, Mrs. Lenygon has also been responsible for the design direction of the Blair Drawing Rooms and the Lee Drawing Room. However, in 1964, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dillon managed the Lee Drawing Room's designs. The change of project management for the room might possibly have been due to Mrs. Kennedy's dislike of Mrs. Lenygon's taste both at the White House Library and Blair House. In her letter to Mrs. Duke, Mrs. Kennedy mentioned she had marked "X" on fabric and color choices she did not approve for Blair House. She clearly thought Mrs. Lenygon's choices of color for the Lee Drawing Room inappropriate (fig. 46). The grouping of colors marked with an "X" by Mrs. Kennedy included fuchsia, chartreuse, royal blue, and hues of magenta. Mrs. Kennedy told Mrs. Duke in her letter, "on the last page, I don't think the Fuchsia and Chartreuse are very appropriate colors for a traditional house -- but, I cannot make out from her handwriting if these are still intended to be used."¹⁰² Though the Lee Drawing Room did not begin its initial transformation until 1964, Mrs. Kennedy warned Mrs. Duke to steer clear of color schemes which deflected from a "traditional" house untrue to its nineteenth-century roots.

¹⁰² Kennedy, "Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding the Interior Design of Blair House)."



Figure 45 Drawing Room. Ca. 1962. View of Lee Drawing Room as First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy saw it before its renovation in 1964. Photograph by Department of State, Visual Services. Office of the Curator, Blair House.

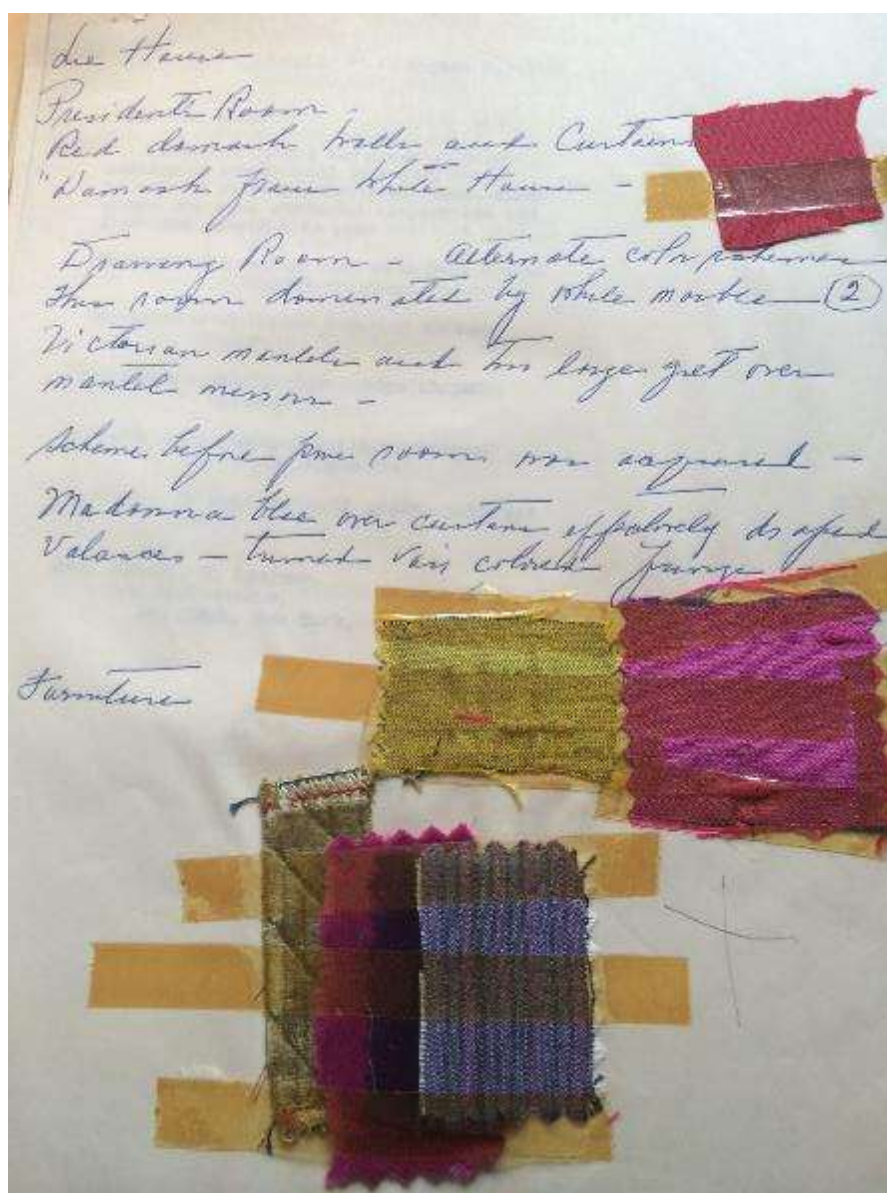


Figure 46 Letter from Mrs. Francis Henry Lenygon, F.A.I.D. to Mrs. Robin Chandler Duke. Ca. 1963. Letter includes taped samples of fabrics and color choices for the renovation of multiple rooms in Blair House. This specific page is marked with an "X" by Mrs. Kennedy, indicating her disapproval of the fabric choices. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Though the Lee Drawing Room should have been designed with a mid-nineteenth century Rococo aesthetic, it received an early-nineteenth century Federal and *chinoiserie* façade. Built in 1859, the Lee House had several Italianate features relevant to the era's

residential style in the mid-nineteenth century. During the Gladys Miller era, the original marble fireplace mantels remained in use (fig. 45). Compared to the changes made during the Kennedy and Johnson renovation, the Lee Dining Room transformed much more into a late-eighteenth century parlor (fig. 47). Architecturally, the most significant change was the replacement of fireplace mantels. After removing the two original marble fireplace mantels, Mr. and Mrs. C. Douglas Dillion purchased two late eighteenth-century Scottish mantels for the room. These two Adam style mantels and their green marble facing and hearths “came from an eighteenth century house in Lieth, Scotland.”¹⁰³ The fireplace mantels, designed with a formal pilasters, scrollwork, and urns, changed the overall scale and character of the drawing room. Instead of a Rococo or Italianate-style room, it quickly took a more federal-style form and matched the adjacent Lee Dining Room. A part from the fireplace mantels, large Victorian mantel mirrors, and curved door frames and moldings, Gladys Miller’s design of the Lee Drawing Room represented the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century American parlor. Use of portraiture, Chippendale- style chairs, easy chairs, lolling chairs, tea tables, and pier tables coordinated with her design of the Lee Dining Room. However, the 1960s renovation completely stripped the room of all of its remaining mid-nineteenth century elements.

¹⁰³ Candace Shireman, “Object File #BH-1964.0147.B,” 2002, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 47 Lee Drawing Room, Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.

Mrs. Johnson's Blair House reception on January 9, 1964 made no mention of the Lee Drawing room having been completed. During the middle of 1964, the drawing room began to take its iconic *chinoiserie* look known today. Mrs. Eleanor Brown of McMillen, Inc. of New York oversaw the majority of the work involved with the room's design. Secretary of the Treasury and Mrs. C. Douglas Dillon provided the funding and donations. As a member of the BHFAC committee, Mrs. Dillon profoundly involved herself in the redesign of the Lee Drawing Room. In May of 1964, the *Washington Post*

columnist Maxine Cheshire publicized the Dillions donation of “an 18th Century Chinese Chippendale drawing room...scheduled for restoration in the summer.”¹⁰⁴ The Chinese Chippendale theme began with the Dillion’s purchase of eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper from Charles R. Gracie & Son, Inc., on June 26, 1964.¹⁰⁵ This magnificent pale green wallpaper features hand-painted indigo blue foliage, blooming purple and pink flowers, magnolia blossoms, leafy trees and plants, rough rocks, spiraling branches, blue herons, pheasants, and graceful butterflies (fig. 48, 49). According to author Elaine Gibbs and Candace Shireman, Curator of Blair House, the “*chinoiserie* wallpaper came from Ashburnham Place, the country estate of John, second Earl of Ashburnham (1724-1812), near Battle, Sussex, England. After their marriage in 1756, the earl and his bride, Elizabeth Crowley (1727-1781), embraced the new decorating style ‘in the Chinese taste.’”¹⁰⁶ The same Chinese taste implemented within the home of the second Earl of Ashburnham inspired the changes in the Lee Drawing room. The use of the hand-painted wallpaper in the new Lee Drawing dictated an English interpretation of the Chinese taste. Pagoda shaped valances, oriental rugs, Chinese porcelain figures from the Kang Xi, Ming and Quing dynasties, regency style black-japanned and gilt *chinoiserie*-decorated chest, and eighteenth-century Chippendale style sofas each helped to formulate the drawing room into a sophisticated traditional space (fig. 50).¹⁰⁷ Damask fabrics served as a

¹⁰⁴ Maxine Cheshire, “Blair House Rooms Scheduled for Face Lifting during Summer,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 1964, sec. sec. B.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine M. Gibbs and Candace Shireman, “Flights of Fancy at Blair House,” *55th Washington Antiques Show: Flights of Fancy*, 2009, 54.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

popular element incorporated with traditional spaces. As with all spaces deemed “traditional” and appropriate by Mrs. Kennedy and Stéphane Boudin, damasks fabric selected by McMillen, Inc, covered the seats of the Chippendale-style chairs, armchairs, and two eighteenth-century Chippendale sofas purchased by the Dillions (fig. 51). The use of a green damask fabric on the majority of pieces in the Lee Drawing Room coordinated quite nicely with all the other damasks in the house.



Figure 48 Chinese wallpaper panel in the Lee Drawing Room. Ca. 1760. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.



Figure 49 Chinese wallpaper panel in the Lee Drawing Room. Ca. 1760. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State. Photo by John Botello.



Figure 50 Lee Drawing serves as the backdrop for President Barack Obama and Cabinet Secretary Chris Lu conversing before a dinner at Blair House, July 31, 2009. Both President Obama and Secretary Lu sit on one of the serpentine back Chippendale sofas, covered with a yellow damask fabric (reupholstered in 1988). Official White House Photo by Pete Souza.

The President's Study

Situated to the left of the Entrance Hall of Lee House, the President's Study, referred to today as the Truman Study, served as the private office of President Truman

during the renovation of the White House (fig. 6). In the 1940s, the room was called the Reception Room and used as an office for heads of state. Gladys Miller's touch on the space reflected the streamlined 1940s practicality with few references to federal accents (fig. 51, 52). According to her description of the space,

“masculine needs [were] considered...[and the room] was simply furnished in Georgian style, but with a contemporary air. The chimney-breast is completely covered with a plate glass mirror, which makes the room seem much larger and also much lighter. The walls and woodwork are painted in a fog-grey and the floor is covered in wall-to-wall broadloom in spice tone.”¹⁰⁸

Use of easy chairs, damask covered chairs, Sheraton-style tables, and a Chippendale bench, designed by Gladys Miller for either the Reception Room or first floor hall, mixed with the mirrored fireplace created the 1940s eclectic aesthetic of a traditional and contemporary design (fig. 53). With its use as a temporary Oval Office for President Truman between 1948 and 1952, the office had few alterations. At some point during President Truman's use of the room, a mantel from the White House was removed and installed. Attributed to Charles F. McKim, the mantel was a part of the 1902 redecoration of the White House (fig. 54, 55).¹⁰⁹ Unknown individuals removed the mantle from a bedroom “once occupied by [First Lady Edith] Roosevelt” at the White House.¹¹⁰ Pictorial evidence indicates McKim designed other mantels for the White House in the same style as the one used in Mrs. Roosevelt's bedroom. During the Kennedy era, the

¹⁰⁸ Gladys Miller, “Reception Room - Blair-Lee House,” n.d., Blair-Lee Plans/Specifications 1944 – Gladys Miller Notebook #2, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁰⁹ “Blair House | The President's Guest House,” accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.blairhouse.org/about/inside-the-home/truman-study>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Blue Room also consisted of a mantel in the same pattern (fig. 41). The Blue Room mantel indicates gilt work on the capitals and center medallion. The mantel provided to Blair House must have been stripped of its gilt work and painted a solid white or cream. One installed in the President's Study, the mantel from the White House fully replaced Gladys Miller's large section of mirror covering the chimney. The 1940s bland and stark design began to shift during President Truman's time and again in the 1960s.



Figure 51 President's Study (Referred to as a reception room in the 1940s). Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Blair-Lee Plans/Specifications 1944 – Gladys Miller Notebook #2, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 52 President's Study (Referred to as a reception room in the 1940s), Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Blair-Lee Plans/Specifications 1944 – Gladys Miller Notebook #2, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

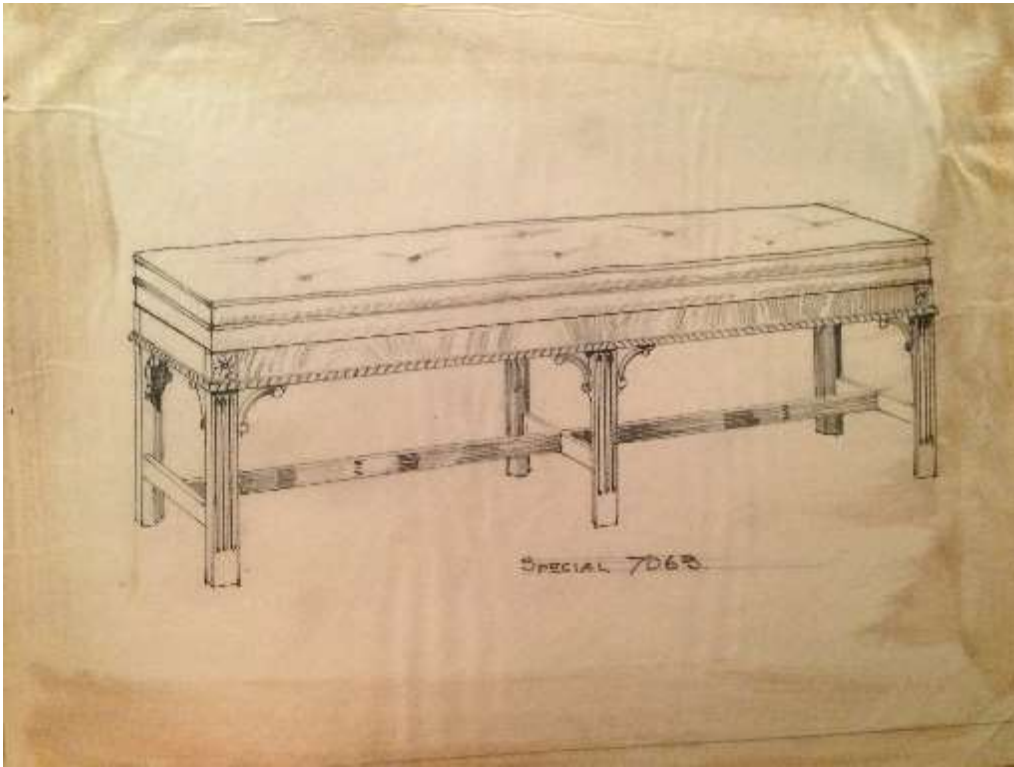


Figure 53 Gladys Miller sketch of a Chippendale style bench. Ca. 1944. Blair-Lee: 1944 Decoration Fabrics Samples, Furniture – Gladys Miller Notebook #6, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

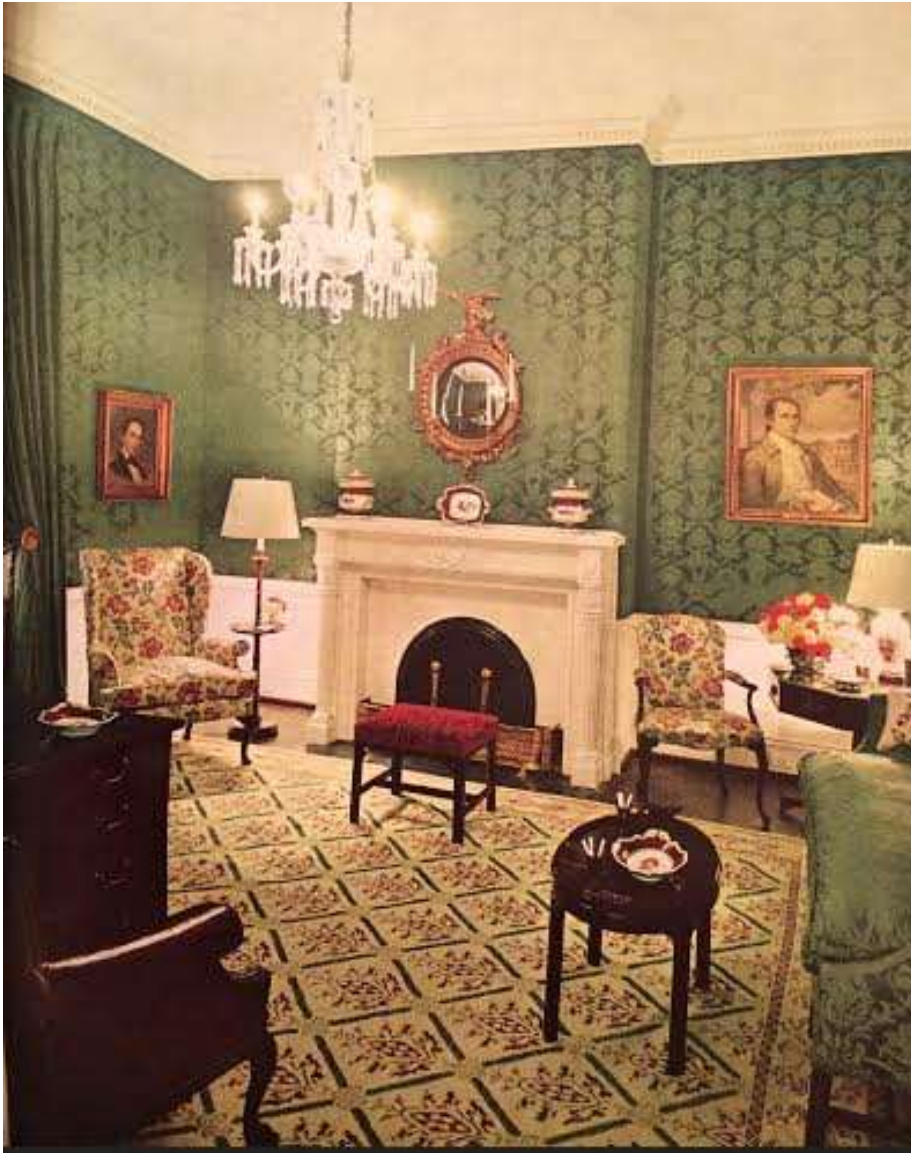


Figure 54 President's Study, Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 55 President's Study. Ca. 1964. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

In 1964, the President's Study underwent its renovation with Mrs. Archibald M. Brown of McMillen, Inc. as the design authority for the room. Written with pencil on the 1960s floor plan of the Blair-Lee House appeared the name "Aldrich (fig. 6)." The name was written on the floor plan within the small room called the "Reception Room 16' x 16'." The former Ambassador to Great Britain and Mrs. Winthrop W. Aldrich contributed the funds for the space. Mrs. Aldrich became very involved in the project and specifically oversaw the installation of the iconic green silk damask for the walls.

The use of green silk damask in the President's Study functioned as one of the most important additions during the Kennedy and Johnson Blair House renovation. Its

choice for a small size room in the President's Guest House with a central fireplace contributed to the overall idea of making Blair House a smaller scale version of the White House. The Green Room in the White House served as the primary source of inspiration for the President's Study. In fact, it replicated the design of the Green Room. The January 9, 1964 State Department press release stated, "the walls of the offices are to be covered with the green damask similar to that used for the White House Green Room."¹¹¹ The green silk damask not only looked similar to the Green Room wall fabric, but it perfectly matched. According to Mrs. Wilroy, the green damask was

"an exact duplicate of the deep green silk that had given the White House Green Room its name. Originally Mrs. Kennedy had sent over the fabric from that room when she removed it as part of her White House redecoration. But unfortunately the silk had split apart with age and could not be used. The firm Scalomadré of New York had made the original damask and had duplicated it exactly for us."

Other publications such as the January 1965 *House & Garden* magazine described the space with "damask walls [that] are the same as in the Green Room at the White House."¹¹² When comparing the Green Room damask with the damask reproduced for the President's Study, the two are identical in both color and design. Both designs incorporated a diamond shaped laurel wreath encompassing a diamond rosette in the center. Above each laurel wreath, a small urn-like shape held a group of flowers whose swirling petals, stems, and ribbons formulated a repeating oval and diamond pattern (fig. 54, 56, 57, 58). This green damask, covering the walls and window of the President's

¹¹¹ "Department of State For the Press Caution - Future Release (Announcement of Blair House Reopening)," January 9, 1964.

¹¹² Robin C. L. Duke, "Blair House," *House & Garden*, January 1965, 88.

Study, replicated the “Truman-era Robert Adam-inspired silk damask produced by Scalamandré.”¹¹³ In addition to the walls and window, the fabric also covered the Chippendale-style sofa. Applying the same fabric on the walls, windows, and furniture echoed a technique use both in the President’s Study and the Green Room. Before Boudin and du Pont completed the Green Room, it held several pieces of furniture covered in the same green damask used on the walls. The Truman-era green damask was still in use through the Kennedy-era until 1962 when taken down and replaced with a green silk moiré fabric. Still, the President’s Study evoked the American Federal aesthetic of the Green Room. As with the Green Room, drapes made of the same green damask covered the window in the President’s Study. With the protruding chimney-breast and former White House mantel, the room’s foundation became on par with the White House.

¹¹³ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 91.



Figure 56 Green Room, White House. December 12, 1961. View of the Green Room of the White House, Washington, D.C. A portrait of Franklin Pierce, painted by George P. A. Healy in 1858, hangs above the mantel on the left. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.



Figure 57 Silk green damask used in the President's Study during the 1960s. Photo taken by Blair House Curator, Candace Shireman. 2015. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 58 Silk green damask used in the President’s Study during the 1960s. Photo taken by John Botello. 2015. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Aside from the matching green damask at the White House, the selection of eighteenth-century antiques and furniture reproductions enhanced the overall feeling of an old and traditional room. The Aldrichs purchased a large and heavy George II partners desk for the room (fig. 55). After being used in the President’s Study from 1964 to 1969, it was transferred over to the State Department building and “used by Secretaries of State from 1969-1993: Rogers, Kissinger, Vance, Haig, Shultz, [and] possibly

Eagleberger.”¹¹⁴ The Aldrich’s interests to purchase items such as the George II partners desk, a copy of Jefferson’s “rent table,” and Chippendale reproductions could have been inspired from their time abroad in Great Britain. The use of such heavy pieces of furniture did not imitate the Green Room, which had more dainty furnishings representing the late eighteenth century. Both du Pont and Boudin worked together to design the Green Room, select its furnishings, and placement of art. Through correspondence between Mrs. Kennedy and the White House Chief Usher J. B. West, it appeared both du Pont and Boudin did not agree with the proper scale and proportions of furniture and architecture. Boudin’s wanted to recreate the Green Room’s 1902 representation of an early nineteenth room, decorated in the “French Empire taste.”¹¹⁵ On the other hand, du Pont had selected the American Federal style for the room with vast amounts of delicate antique and reproduction furniture of the Sheraton and Hepplewhite forms. Though Boudin disapproved du Ponts selections of furniture and scale, “the Frenchman attempted to think American Federal.”¹¹⁶ Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dillions’ selection of furnishings favored more the ideas and taste of du Pont rather than Boudin. However, their choice in the style of draperies complimented and stayed in tune with Boudin’s ideas. The design of Green Room’s drapes purposefully fit within the window frame to expose the architectural elements of frames and the space (fig. 56). Du Pont suggested this idea.¹¹⁷ Boudin was more interested in drapes that covered the windows

¹¹⁴ Candace Shireman, “Object File #BH-1993.3722,” n.d., Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹¹⁵ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 89.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

completely to enhance the height of a space. Based on the green damask drapes made for the President's Study, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dillion leaned more towards the recommendations of Boudin (fig. 55). Knowing Mrs. Dillion served on both the Fine Arts Committee for the White House and the BHFAC, she likely found her inspiration from the designs of Boudin and the advice of du Pont.

Lee Entrance Hall and Second Floor Landing

Just outside the President's Study is the Lee Entrance Hall (fig. 6). Before its renovation in the 1960s, the Entrance Hall still looked as it did during the 1940s (fig. 59). Gladys Miller chose a light grey paint color for the walls and black and white tile for the flooring. Typical of the period, the black and white tile was installed in a checkered pattern. The only pieces of furniture used in the space consisted of a Chippendale mirror, an antique George III oak console table, and two reproduction side chairs. The 1960s renovation however called for more of a "diplomatic" choice in design.



Figure 59 Lee Entrance Hall. Ca. 1944. Interior designed by Gladys Miller. Blair-Lee Plans/Specifications 1944 – Gladys Miller Notebook #2, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Scenic wallpapers during the mid-nineteenth century were considered at the height of fashion. Artisans painted scenes depicting patriotism, victorious battles, historic events, and landscapes on paper. The wallpapers hung on all the adjoining walls of one

room. The panoramic scenes within a space enraptured its dwellers and enticed their fascination with history.

This same fascination with history also enraptured du Pont during the Kennedy renovation at the White House. As part of their continuation to redesign the Diplomatic Reception Room on the Ground Floor of the executive mansion, first begun by the Eisenhowers, du Pont and Mrs. Kennedy approved and selected an original set of scenic wallpaper panels to be used in the oval room (fig. 60). Resting just one floor below the Blue Room, the Diplomatic Reception Room is used to greet foreign heads of state and dignitaries by the President and First Lady. The wallpaper selected and purchased was titled “Scenic America” and produced in France by Zuber & Company. Produced in 1834, “the paper portrayed an idealized North American landscape featuring Virginia’s Natural Bridge, Boston Harbor, and the United States Military Academy at West Point.”¹¹⁸ Use of this scenic wallpaper was not limited to the Ground Floor. A similar wallpaper depicting “Scenes of the American Revolution” ca. 1855 hung on the second floor in the president and first families’ private dining room (fig. 61). Pictorial extracts of an “idealized” North America illustrated just the type of idea Mrs. Kennedy and du Pont wished to visually portray throughout the house. Before Mrs. Kennedy’s time in the White House, First Lady Mamie Eisenhower had begun to accept fine American antique furnishings for the Diplomatic Reception Room. According to the former White House Curator Betty Monkman,

“[the] gift of furnishings [during the Eisenhower administration] from the period of the building of the White House and its earliest occupancy was

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 121.

the first successful attempt to furnish a room in the White House with American antiques of the highest quality, and it set a precedent for Jacqueline Kennedy's efforts in the early 1960s to bring a historic character to the house."¹¹⁹

The "historic character" most desired for the home, both reflective of American taste and European taste, initiated during the Kennedy renovation with the use of the scenic wallpaper.



Figure 60 Diplomatic Reception Room, West Sitting Hall, White House. October 30, 1961. Renovation work. Diplomatic Reception Room, White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

¹¹⁹ Betty C. Monkman, *The White House: Its Historic Furnishings & First Families* (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 2000), 226.



Figure 61 President's Dining Room, White House. February 7, 1962. President's Dining Room (Residence), White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

Within archival documentation, Mrs. Kennedy was noted as the individual who sent over fragments of unused scenic wallpaper to Blair House during its renovation (fig. 62, 63). Having used it in the Diplomatic Reception Room, Mrs. Kennedy and her design advisers must have thought the unused wallpaper to be most suitable at Blair House. According to a memorandum sent to Clement Conger, Curator of the Diplomatic Reception Room at State Department from 1961 to 1990, from Cassandra Stone, Curator of Blair House in the 1980s, the Zuber wallpaper titled "Scenic America" "had been

given by the White House Preservation Fund in 1984.”¹²⁰ This is the only record stating a scenic wallpaper had been given to Blair House from the White House. Other records at Blair House mention a Dufour wallpaper of the “The Banks of Bosphorus,” but this wallpaper was given by a donor named Mrs. Edwin Herzog in 1985. Thus, the only wallpaper noted to have been transferred from the White House to Blair House in the 1960s was the Zuber wallpaper. In January of 1965, *House and & Garden* magazine explained the “paper in Blair-Lee hall was part of a White House gift.”¹²¹ Another mention of the wallpaper appeared in *The Sun* newspaper in April of 1964. According to the article, “the walls of the first floor hallway are covered with a French wallpaper mural showing a Greek festival. It was a gift of Mrs. Kennedy, who got it for [the] White House.”¹²²

¹²⁰ Cassandra Stone, “Memorandum to Mr. Clement E. Conger from Cassandra R. Stone,” July 25, 1985, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹²¹ Duke, “Blair House,” January 1965. 95.

¹²² Caryl Rivers, “Blair House-Showcase for the Best,” *The Sun*, April 19, 1964, sec. C1.

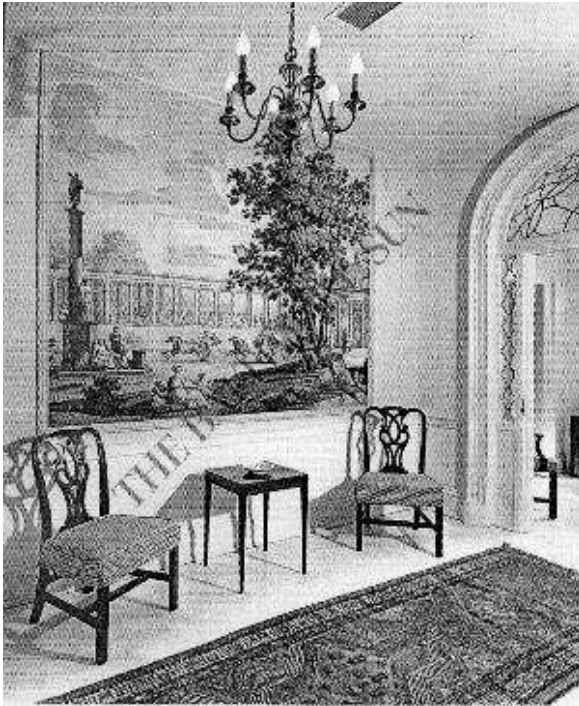


Figure 62 Lee Front Entrance Hall. Ca. 1964. Image shows the use of fragment from a scenic wallpaper in the Entrance Hall. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 63 Second Floor Landing of Blair-Lee House. Ca. 1979. Image show fragments of scenic wallpaper in the second floor landing. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

The wallpaper was believed to be taken down the during the 1980s renovations of Blair House. Because the wallpaper came in sections, it made most sense to install it in parts both on the first floor's Lee Entrance Hall and on the second floor landing (fig. 62, 63). The installation of the wallpaper in the Entrance Hall of Blair House proved to be practical, due to its separated sections and strategic placement. In placing it within a front entrance hall, the wallpaper served to replicate the same look and feel at the White House. Both the Diplomatic Reception Room and the Lee Entrance Hall were covered with a scenic wallpaper of "American" imagery and served as the threshold for foreign heads of state. Together, they defined the visual aesthetic of a "diplomatic" reception room.

The Lincoln Room

After the summer of 1964, one of the final rooms to be completed in Blair House proper was the Lincoln Room (fig. 64). Directly across from the Blair Front Drawing Room, off of the Blair Entrance Hall (fig. 6), the Lincoln Room is notable not only as a reception room for all foreign heads of state, but also as the office of Montgomery Blair during the 1860s. This room served as the personal office where he often met and advised President Abraham Lincoln, who frequently dropped in and sat by the fireplace in the room. The room witnessed many of the United States most important conversations and historic events. In this room, Montgomery Blair offered Robert E. Lee command of the Union Army at the request of President Lincoln.¹²³ "Then Colonel Lee declined, saying,

¹²³ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 142.

‘Though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I [can] take no part in an invasion of the Southern States.’ Lee soon decamped southward to accept command of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia.’¹²⁴



Figure 64 Lincoln Room, Blair House, The President’s Guest House. January 1965. Cover image of *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.

¹²⁴ “Blair House | The President’s Guest House,” accessed November 12, 2015, <http://www.blairhouse.org/about/inside-the-home/lincoln-room>.

In comparison to the rest of 1960s Blair House renovations, the Lincoln Room did not drastically change in regards to placement of art and furnishings used in the space. Several of the objects in the space such as Francis Preston's drop front desk and letters regarding Lincoln, Montgomery Blair's resignation from Lincoln's cabinet, and Robert E. Lee's refusal to accept the command of the Union Army existed within the original Blair family collection.¹²⁵ The original designs of the space by Gladys Miller in the 1940s remained a part of the 1960s changes (fig. 64, 65, 66). The 1960s placement and use of prints, political cartoons "depicting the fight in Congress over admitting Texas to the Union, in the time of Polk's administration[,], a large picture [of] Lincoln's cabinet, with Montgomery Blair featured rather prominently[, and a] circular frame [of] the wedding picture of Francis Preston Blair and his wife," hung on the wall in the same clustered and grouped pattern specified by Gladys Miller in the 1940s (fig. 67)¹²⁶ When recollecting her memories of the renovation, Mrs. Wilroy explained, "the [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] had contributed the funds to redo the room. Since most of the furniture was going to remain where it was, the money was spent on other things in the room."¹²⁷ According to Mrs. Wilroy, the only new additions to the Lincoln Room were the silk wallpaper, draperies, valances, and the handmade Portuguese rug. The striped silk covering the walls came manufactured in rich yellow and gold tones. Yellow damask fabric covered the settee and arm chairs. Accents of green in the fabrics

¹²⁵ Gladys Miller, "Blair House - Waiting Room and Offices," n.d., Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 141.

and rug and red glass complimented the existing and historic elements of the mid-nineteenth century inspired space. Though there are no clear connections to the White House, a references exist regarding the Lincoln Room's Blair family ruby glass chandelier. In the April 16, 1963 BHFAC meeting minutes, it's documented "the red chandelier in the Lincoln Room should be used in the new 'Red Room.'"¹²⁸ When referencing the "Red Room," Mrs. Duke seemed interested in redesigning Blair House Library on the second floor to replicate the Red Room in the White House. The ruby glass chandelier in the Lincoln Room remained unremoved during the 1960s renovation, but its color inspired the concept for the Library.



Figure 65 Lincoln Room, Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹²⁸ Duke, "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee, April 16, 1963."



Figure 66 Lincoln Room, Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

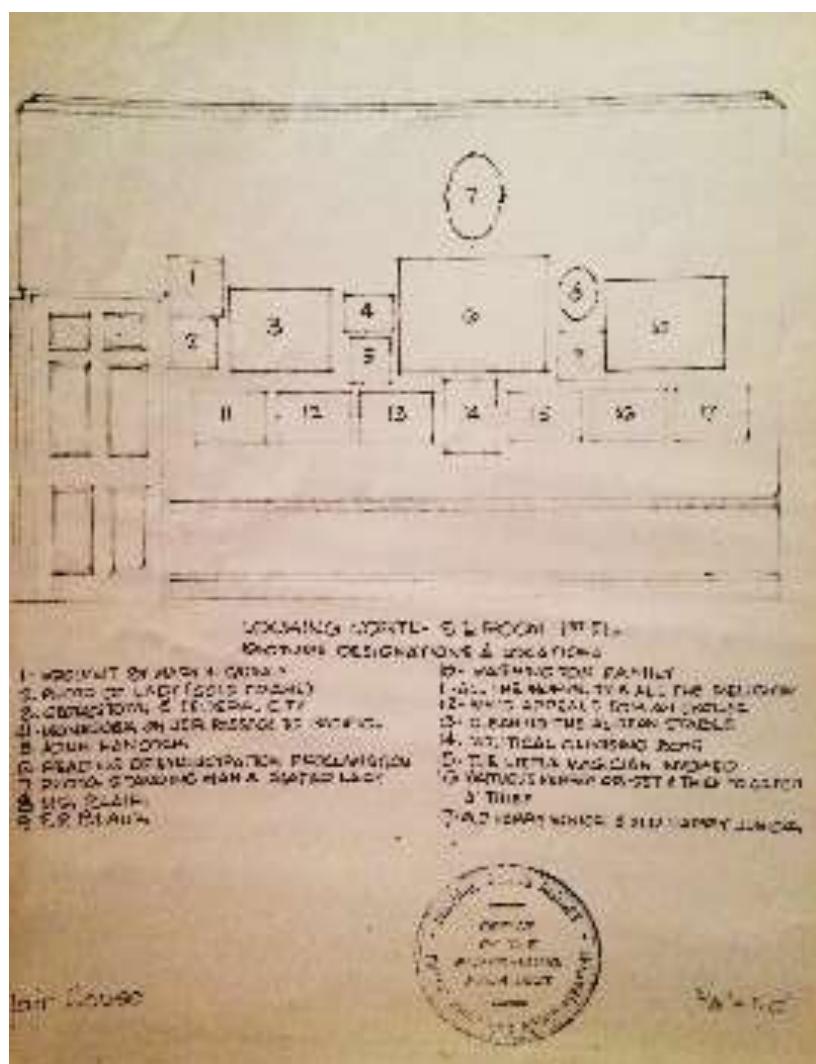


Figure 67 Gladys Miller's sketch of the Lincoln Room's picture hanging plan, Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

CHAPTER THREE: RENOVATING THE PRIVATE QUARTERS

The King's Library

By the fall of 1964, the 1960s Blair House renovation came to a close. The second floor of both Blair House and Lee House were renovated one room at a time. Aside from the bedrooms, the Library served as the only formal public space on the second floor. The Library, often called the King's Library in the 1960s, sat just above the Blair Rear Drawing Room and Blair Dining Room (fig. 7). In addition to holding a vast collection of antique books original to the Blair family collection, the Library served as an informal and private space for foreign heads of state and guests to relax. During the Gladys Miller 1940s period, the room was given few updates (fig. 68). Its architectural heavy moldings, ceiling medallions, cornices, and pediment door frames remained original to the house and remained a light cream color during the 1940s. Gladys Miller used a majority of the 1920s furniture and had it re-upholstered. After decluttering the space, the government purchased and installed simple draw curtains.¹²⁹ Gladys Miller chose a very simple and safe palate for the Library. She found no concern with dramatically changing the space. In her eyes, it already looked like a complete space equipped with enough original architectural character.

¹²⁹ Gladys Miller, "Blair House - Library," n.d., Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 68 Library, Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

In complete contrast to Gladys Miller's light and pale palette, the Library transformed into a bold red room in 1964 (fig. 69, 70). The designers grouped the placements of furniture into three sections. Two sitting areas sat on opposite ends of the room and in the center of the room, a Chippendale-style desk and chairs were positioned in between the two large windows. Compared to Gladys Miller's random scattering of furnishings, the new configuration and grouping of furniture provided more of a functional and formal setting for the room. The large and long rectangular room was now sectioned off into three functioning spaces equip with one informal seating area with a color television, one formal seating area beside the fireplace, and a central study area.



Figure 69 Library, Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.

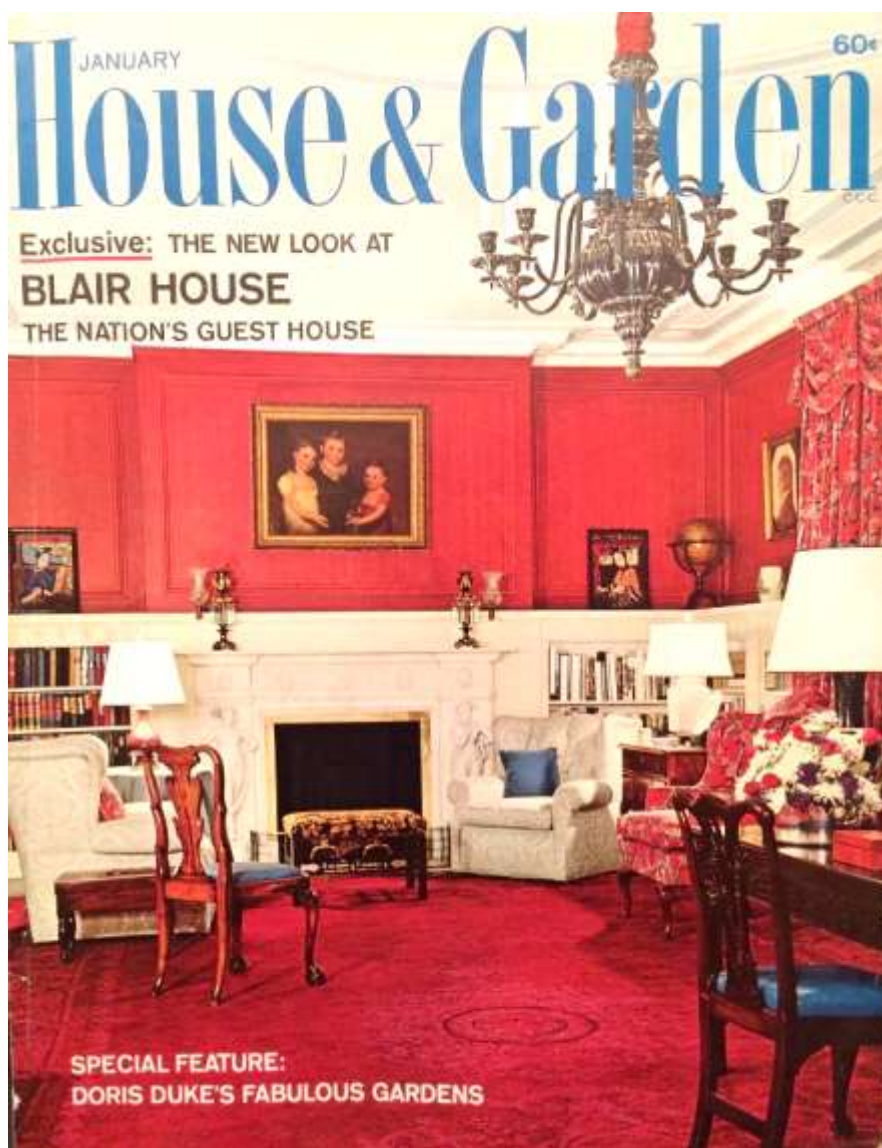


Figure 70 Library, Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Cover image of *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.

Under Secretary of State and Mrs. W. Averell Harriman funded the Library. Mrs. Harriman, a BHFAC member, had one condition under which her funding be used for the renovation of Blair House. She required the Library be designed by her personal interior

designer, Keith Irvine of New York.¹³⁰ According to a letter from Mrs. Duke to Mrs. Harriman in January of 1964, she asks Mrs. Harriman of her interest in funding the painting of the Library, which according to Mrs. Duke “was not up to the caliber [they] would have liked. [The] job [of painting the Library poorly] was done on government contract.”¹³¹ Painting the Library red had already been decided on and set in place. Before asking Mrs. Harriman of her assistance to fund the painting, Mrs. Duke had planned to cover the Library walls with a red damask fabric provided by the White House. In her April 7, 1963 letter to Mrs. Duke, Mrs. Kennedy offered the Red Room’s old damask fabric (fig. 71). The red damask used in the Red Room prior to its 1961 renovation was removed and replaced with Boudin’s selection of a 1812 reproduction solid red cerise silk (fig. 72). Mrs. Kennedy wrote, “the Red Room damask which Angie [, U.S. Chief of Protocol, Angier Biddle Duke,] mentioned to me for a little library in Blair-Lee House is still available – so if you want it tell Mr. West.”¹³² Thus, Mrs. Duke did as Mrs. Kennedy suggested and contacted Mr. J. B. West, the White House Chief Usher, regarding the transfer of the red damask from the White House to Blair House. Much to Mrs. Duke’s surprise, an employee from the State Department Protocol Office informed her Mr. William Voss Elder III, a White House curatorial staffer and registrar,

¹³⁰ Robin C. L. Duke, “Letter from Mrs. Duke to Mrs. Catherine Laird,” March 23, 1964, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹³¹ Robin C. L. Duke, “Letter from Mrs. Duke to Under Secretary of State and Mrs. W. Averell Harriman. Mrs. Harriman,” January 31, 1964, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹³² Kennedy, “Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding Mrs. Kennedy’s Involvement with the Blair House Restoration).” 2.

had expressed Blair House could not have the damask. On May 22, 1963, Mrs. Duke wrote to Mrs. Kennedy and uttered,

“I am crushed and sick at heart to learn that Mr. Elder says we cannot have the red damask left over from the Red Room. We were planning, as you know, to use it in the little library where the President occasionally meets with Heads of State. Do you think you could retrieve this material for us, as historically it would be so interesting for use at Blair House.”

Unfortunately, the red damask from the Red Room never made it to Blair House. From May of 1963 to January of 1964, Mrs. Duke’s and Mrs. Kennedy’s inspiration of the color red remained the desire for Blair House Library. With the alternate solution of painting the walls red in place of the red damask, Mrs. Harriman also purchased new sheet curtains and red floral chintz drapes for the two large windows on the north wall. Mr. Irvine chose a deep red rug for the long rectangular space, accents of light blue - to highlight the architectural moldings – painted on the ceiling, blue trim on the drapes, and “three plaster busts of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.”¹³³ Mr. Irvine seemed to have the same instincts with period rooms as those of du Pont. In a letter to Mrs. Duke on August 9, 1963, Mr. Irvine explained,

“Blair House should be made to feel like somebody’s home – inherited and continually growing. One that would reflect the best aspects of the American way of life. Really it should look like a kind of Cabot, Astor, Bryce, Guest, Phipps, Paley house. I realize this whole approach is a difficult and almost over-subtle one, but I think it is the proper solution.”¹³⁴

¹³³ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 129.

¹³⁴ Keith B. Irving, “Letter from Mr. Irvine to Mrs. Duke,” August 9, 1963, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President’s Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

By placing plaster busts of historical figures around the top of the built-in book shelves, keeping the original Georgian chandelier, original Blair family Chippendale style chairs and desk, Queen Anne style chairs, and “portraits of Presidents on loan from the National Portrait Gallery,” Mr. Irving highlighted the significance of the Georgian paneling and architecture in the space.¹³⁵



Figure 71 Red Room, White House. November 2, 1961. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

¹³⁵ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 145-146.



Figure 72 Red Room, White House. May 8, 1962. View of the Red Room. White House, Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

The Library at Blair House aligned with a style reflective of America's late nineteenth century. Its red color and potential use of a red damask from the White House suggested Mrs. Duke, Mrs. Kennedy, and the fine arts committees all thought of ways to construct a cohesive look on either side of Pennsylvania Avenue. A part from the red color of the Red Room, Blair House Library did not have many other similarities to the Red Room at the White House.

When designing the Red Room with Sister Parish and Boudin, Mrs. Kennedy sought to bring a similar French taste employed in the Blue Room. During one of her

trips to France as first lady, she took a tour of Château de Malmaison, the home of Empress Joséphine de Beauharnais. She particularly found interest with the French Empire style and the bold red color selections by Percier & Fontaine in Josephine's bedroom. Seeing Boudin had been involved with restoration projects at Malmaison and Buckingham Palace, she trusted his recommendations for the White House.¹³⁶ Advisors such as du Pont concerned themselves with the ideas of Boudin. There existed a worry for creating a French inspired White House. In fact, Sister Parish took most of the credit for the design of the Red Room.¹³⁷ Due to foreseen disapproval of Boudin among the American public, she became the credited designer.¹³⁸ Boudin himself understood America's probable disinterest in his involvement. A *New York Times* article stated Boudin "said he was aware Americans would not like the idea of having a Frenchmen 'doing over' the White House."¹³⁹ But to Mrs. Kennedy, incorporation of Franco-American décor did not seem completely unpatriotic. She understood the importance in history of President Jefferson's connection to Napoleonic France as Secretary of State and President Monroe's commission of the Blue Room suite of Bellangé gilt furniture. Bellangé was tasked to create suites of furniture for both President Monroe and Napoleon and Joséphine.¹⁴⁰ Mrs. Kennedy took to heart Boudin's passion to add France's definition of "stately" to American rooms filled with dainty Phyfe furnishings and simple American

¹³⁶ Smith, *Grace and Power*, 206.

¹³⁷ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 87.

¹³⁸ Seale, *The President's House*, 345.

¹³⁹ Milton Bracker, "Parisian Assesses White House Decor: DECOR IS STUDIED AT WHITE HOUSE," *The New York Times*, April 1, 1961.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *Grace and Power*, 206.

federal moldings and architecture. The White House and Blair House needed to represent America but at the same time had to symbolize the presidency and its stately executive authority. Like Mrs. Kennedy, Boudin “felt that without altering the essential character of the White House, it could be made to ‘represent the United States in a bit more elegant and refined way.’”¹⁴¹ In using both American and French Empire furnishings and the color red, a neoclassical American aesthetic became celebrated and the space a nationally recognized icon. The Library in Blair House may have not been equipped with a variety of American and French Empire furnishings, but it did sport the iconic red used across the street and provided a look into the Kennedy’s promotion of the American arts.

American arts viewed through the Kennedy lens were quite energetic and progressive compared to previous administrations. Specifically promoting America’s cultural arts internationally endured as a top priority of both President and Mrs. Kennedy. “Some sort of federal participation in the arts” [was important to President Kennedy and he was aware] ‘the United States had no equivalent to a minister of culture.’”¹⁴² After requesting the aide of August Hecksher, a supreme New York art expert, a proposed “arts advisory to the president [was established and thus] evolved into the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities.”¹⁴³ In addition to a national scene centered on the arts, the Kennedy’s quite vividly displayed their interests by using the White House as a stage for American talent and artistry. Performances in the White House consisted of

¹⁴¹ Bracker, “Parisian Assesses White House Decor: DECOR IS STUDIED AT WHITE HOUSE.”

¹⁴² Seale, *The President’s House*, 355.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 355.

varieties of ballet, opera, jazz bands, gospel music, instrumentalists, and literary recitations from prominent American authors and poets. From Robert Frost to the American Ballet Theatre, a direct light on the American arts shined in the United States and around the world. Even an “out of the box” State Dinner took place at George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate by the Kennedys for the president of Pakistan, Mohammad Auyub Khan in July of 1961.¹⁴⁴ The Kennedy’s found inspiration to host a dinner at Mount Vernon from similar dinners they attended in Vienna at Schönbrunn Palace and at the French royal palace of Versailles.¹⁴⁵ Though America had no palaces, Mount Vernon served to educate and showcase American romanticism in the same manner Schönbrunn Palace and Versailles did for Vienna and France. From an international standpoint, the Kennedy’s created opportunities for foreign visitors to understand the American landscape and culture.

Mrs. Duke understood the cultural arts initiatives set in place by the Kennedys and strove to incorporate elements of American culture in Blair House. The library served

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 354.

¹⁴⁵ Bruce Riedel, ed., “Prologue:,” in *JFK’s Forgotten Crisis, Tibet, the CIA, and Sino-Indian War* (Brookings Institution Press, 2015), ix – xviii, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt15hvr1q>, 3. The dinner at Mount Vernon was critical to the Kennedy’s American royal persona. Kennedy scholar Bruce Riedel and Hollywood’s White House scholar Luc Herman discuss the importance of the “Camelot” factor during the Kennedy years. Luce Herman’s scholarship related to this topic is found in his work titled “Bestowing Knighthood: The Visual Aspects of Bill Clinton’s Camelot Legacy:” in *Hollywood’s White House, The American Presidency in Film and History* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 309-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcg7w.24>. Riedel expresses in his book’s prologue the importance of the Kennedy’s hosting the first State Dinner outside of the White House at Mount Vernon. Riedel states the Kennedy’s used Mount Vernon in the same manner other country’s used their palaces.

as the perfect place to provide foreign heads of state a glimpse of American work. From the first BHFAC meeting in April of 1963, Mrs. Duke expressed her desire to see copies of classic American literature in the Library. “[If] they started a book of Robert Frost’s poems[,] they might take it away with them back to their country...we do want them to feel, ‘Of course, take them away. Enjoy them. Read them.’”¹⁴⁶ Mrs. Duke made the collection of books a reality by appointing Mrs. Stewart Udall, wife of the Secretary of Interior, the Chairman of the Blair House Fine Arts Library project. Mrs. Udall both catalogued the existing collection of Blair family books and

“enlisted the aid of American publishers to make a collection of the best of American books covering every possible area of literature, including American classics, many contemporary fine arts books and a selective group of contemporary works.”¹⁴⁷

For the same reasons of providing color television sets and cuff links to guests, as a way to establish positive relationships and a hospitable environment, American books were kept in stock. By encouraging guests to read American masterworks, Blair House staff hoped they might feel inspired and educated by American culture.

Second Floor Bedrooms

The renovation of the principle bedrooms on the second floor of Blair-Lee House lasted from January of 1964 to October of 1964. These four bedrooms consisted of the Queen’s Suite (Bedroom #24), the King’s Room (Bedroom #23), The Lincoln Bedroom (Bedroom #27), and The Prime Minister’s Room (Bedroom #21) (fig. 73, 74, 75, 76).

¹⁴⁶ Duke, “Minutes of the First Meeting of the Blair House Fine Arts Committee, April 16, 1963.”

¹⁴⁷ Duke, “Blair House History (Mrs. Duke’s Speech).” 11.

Each of these rooms are located on the second floor of Blair-Lee House (fig. 7). The newly designed bedrooms looked vastly different from their former Gladys Miller interiors (fig. 77, 78, 79, 80). A majority of the furniture used in the rooms all existed within the original Blair family collection. Some of the curly maple furniture belonged to Francis Preston Blair and he brought it to the house from their home in Kentucky in the early nineteenth century. Though usage of Blair family antiques were appropriate for the traditional spaces, Gladys Miller's selection of simple pinched and pleated drapes come to be very drab and institutionalized by the 1960s. A feeling of emptiness and starkness could be felt when standing in a room such as the Lincoln room with the antique sleigh bed (fig. 79). The Empire style bed, both handsome and beautifully veneered, seemed to be lost in Miller's sea of muted greys, whites, blues, and greens. In general, the rooms looked bare, bland, and uncoordinated. The shabby and worn 1940s linens and fabrics did not meet the standards for the President's Guess House.



Figure 73 Queen's Suite (Bedroom #24), Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 74 King's Room (Bedroom #23), Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 75 Lincoln Bedroom (Bedroom #27), Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 76 Lincoln Bedroom (Bedroom #27), Blair House, The President's Guest House. January 1965. Image appeared in *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.



Figure 77 Blair House Guest Bedroom (possibly the Queen's Suite in the 1940s), Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 78 King's Suite (called the Ranking Guest Bedroom in the 1940s), Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 79 Blair House Guest Bedroom (possibly the Lincoln Bedroom), Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 80 Blair House Guest Bedroom (possibly the Minister of State Bedroom), Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1944. Gladys Miller Scrapbook #1. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

On January 9, 1964, just in time for Mrs. Johnson's reception for the partial completion of the Blair House renovation, the Queen's Suite was the first of the principle bedrooms to be completed (fig. 73). Lord and Taylor funded both the Queen's Bedroom and its adjacent Sitting Room renovations. The company chose their well-established interior decorator Raymond Waldron to design and oversee the Queen's Suite project.¹⁴⁸ After its completion, a *New York World-Telegram and Sun* newspaper article headline read, "Queen's Suite Regal in Federal Décor."¹⁴⁹ Waldron chose a variety of federal

¹⁴⁸ "Department of State For The Press (No. 458)" (U.S. Department of State, October 19, 1964), Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁴⁹ Marilyn Milow, "Queen's Suite Regal in Federal Decor," *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, April 11, 1964.

Hepplewhite and Sheraton pieces for the room and selected eighteenth-century inspired colors. These colors consisted of light pink, off-white, and blue. The light pink was selected for the majority of the fabrics. Both the bed hangings and drapes were made of a pink silk with a traditional damask and floral pattern (fig. 81). Lord and Taylor purchased and provided everything needed for the new Queen's Suite. The major additions included, antique furniture, an Adam style mantel, fabrics, linens, accessories, and architectural cornices and dado railing. Waldron found it particularly important to reference historic spaces popular among the key players in the historic preservation and collecting realm. Waldron explained the additions of cornices and dado railings in the Queen's suite were "inspired by the cornice in the south bedroom of Monticello [and] a room in the Metropolitan Museum's American Wing."¹⁵⁰ Inspiration from such places made sense for the era and Mrs. Kennedy's interest in such sites. Elevating the comfort levels of important guest suites while still evoking a spirit of history accomplished the design goal of the second floor bedrooms. Waldron understood this concept when designing the Queen's suite and reiterated in the press "the White House and Blair House are the greatest monuments of public hospitality in America."¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

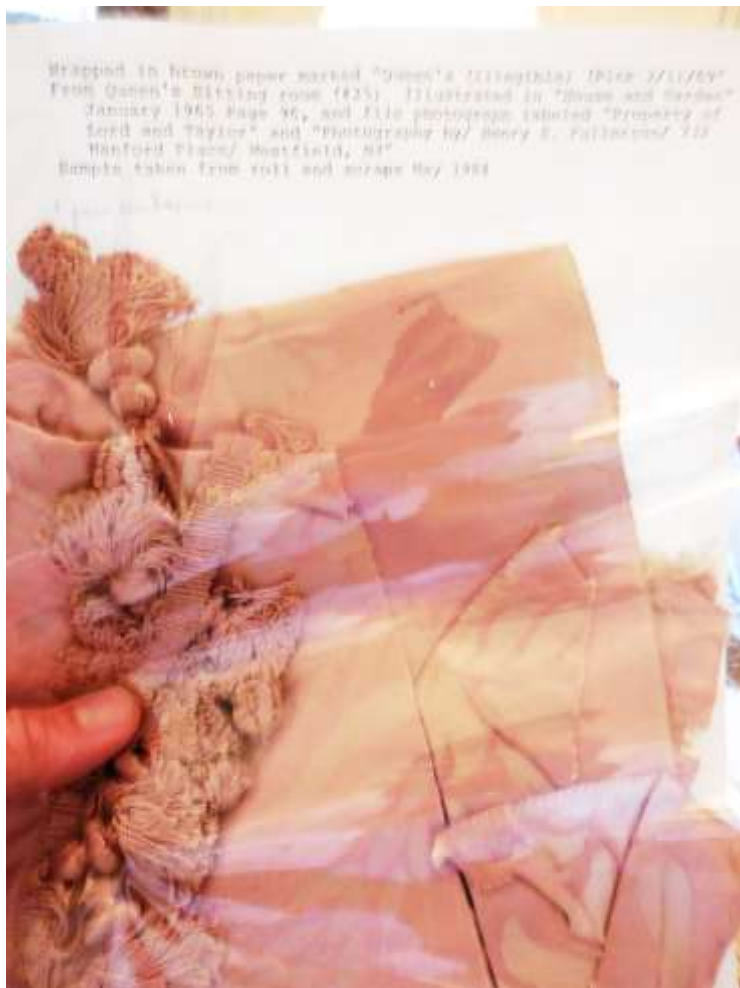


Figure 81 Pink silk damask fabric, Ca. 1964. Fabric used for the bed hangings and window drapes in the Queen's Bedroom. Fabric selected by Lord & Taylor for the Queen's Bedroom. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

The King's Room, later referred to as Head of State's Bedroom, sat directly across from the Library and adjacent to the Queen's Sitting Room (fig. 7, 74). The room served as the private bedroom of President Truman during his three year tenure at Blair House. During the 1960s work, McMillen, Inc. designed the room and BHFAC members, Ms. Harcourt Amory Jr. and Ambassador and Mrs. Duke funded its redecoration. Its color scheme of red and cream complimented to the Library. Additionally, the use of red

had historically had been used in the room. Thus, Mrs. Duke and Mrs. Amory thought the tradition should be continued. Use of the color black in the rug, deep red linen, cream cottons, and oversized original Blair family maple furnishings contributed to the declared “masculinity” among BHFAC members and individuals involved in its décor. Mrs. Wilroy in particular must have associated the color red with masculinity. She commented the Library looked like “a masculine and richly colorful room” and the King’s Room appeared “large and masculine in scale.”¹⁵² Mrs. Duke herself knew long before the renovation of the Library it would be masculine in appearance. Within her remarks in the Sunday Star newspaper in June of 1963, she “hope[d] to transform [the Library] into ‘a marvelous man’s room.’”¹⁵³

In comparison to the masculinity of the King’s Room and the Library, the Prime Minister’s Room (Room #21) was decorated in a neutral palette of beige, light blue, and accents of green (fig. 76). Across from the hall from the Library, the Prime Minister’s Room was once occupied by Mrs. Bess Truman during her husband’s presidency from 1948 to 1952 (fig. 7). Before and after the 1960s redesign, the room commonly housed visiting foreign prime ministers. Like the other bedrooms, the majority of furnishings in the room were original Blair family antiques. Mr. and Mrs. James Dunnell II funded the room’s paint, upholstery, bed linens, draperies, and the four-poster bed’s embroidered hangings. At the time, the Ohio couple had wished to remain anonymous. Its federal

¹⁵² Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 144.

¹⁵³ Saltonstall, “Diplomatically Speaking: Blair House Not Quite Fit For Kings.”

style, similar to that of the King and Queen's Rooms, drastically differentiated from the American Empire aesthetic in the Lincoln Bedroom.

American Empire furniture actuated the theme of the Lincoln Bedroom (fig. 75). Typically, a close staffer, personal secretary, or relative to a head of state occupied this room. *House & Garden* magazine decorated and funded this small guest bedroom. It resided directly across the hall from the Queen's Suite. The magazine's Decorator Editor, Arthur Leaman worked alongside Dr. Richard H. Howland to make selections of antique furnishings and design decisions. Dr. Howland, a Smithsonian Curator within the Department of Civil History, served as a BHFAC member and advisor to Blair House. After White House Curator James Ketchum declined the offer to serve as Curator of both Blair House and the White House, the committee approached Dr. Howland for the job.¹⁵⁴ Due to the government technicalities and regulations, Dr. Howland remained only as an advisor to Blair House. Within the Lincoln Bedroom, the original Blair family antique sleigh bed and purchased Empire style furnishings stood in the room. Green and beige striped wallpaper with a blue paisley motif hung around the room with coordinating beige drapes tied back with antique brass rosettes (fig. 82, 83). Shortly after Blair House officially celebrated their completion of renovations on October 22, 1964, Mrs. Johnson conducted her final approval and walkthrough of the space (fig. 84).

¹⁵⁴ Robin C. L. Duke, "Letter from Mrs. Duke to Dr. Howland," November 23, 1964, Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 82 Beige and green striped wallpaper with paisley motif, Ca. 1964. Wallpaper selected by *House & Garden* magazine for the Lincoln Bedroom. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

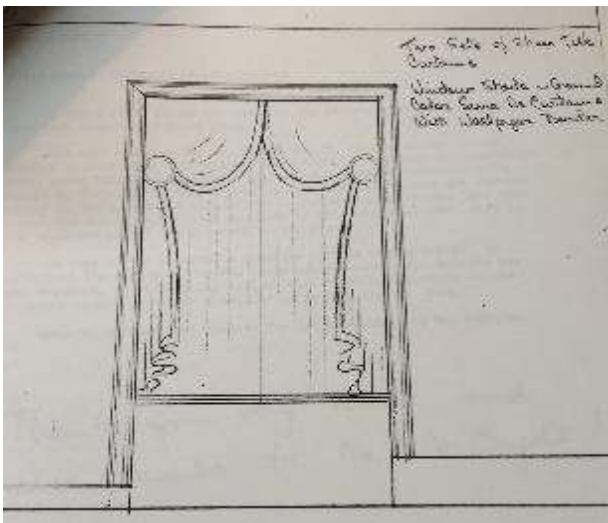


Figure 83 Sketched design for window drapes in the Lincoln Bedroom, Ca. 1964. Window drapes designed by *House & Garden* magazine for the Lincoln Bedroom. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 84 Mrs. Johnson touring the renovated Blair House (Mrs. Johnson stands in the Lincoln Bedroom on the Second Floor of Blair-Lee House and inspects objects placed in the Empire style secretary desk), Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca. 1964. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

Use of formal room titles at Blair House issued a clear distinction from the first floor renovations and the second floor renovations. Recreating spaces reflective of the same character as the White House was visually stronger on the first floor of the 1960s Blair and Lee House. However, the names of the formal rooms on the first floor did not change to match the names of the State Room at the White House. Rooms such as the President's Study at Blair House did not change in title to the Green Room, rather it only changed in its décor to mimic the Green Room. Apart from the second floor Library, the bedrooms in Blair House weren't necessarily redesigned to visually mimic rooms at the White House. The majority of changes to these bedrooms consisted of new paint, rugs, upholstery, and draperies. Aside from the few furnishings purchased for spaces, the

majority of pieces used consisted of original Blair family furnishings. Their room titles changed to reflect the prestige of the Kennedy White House. Blair House's Lincoln Bedroom, with its American Empire furnishings and striped wallpaper, looked nothing like the Victorian style Lincoln Bedroom at the White House. Due to its iconic function as a prominent White House guest bedroom, Blair House sought to name guest rooms with the same titles. Thus, foreign heads of state and their delegations made connections between the White House and Blair House. From it, a sense of presidential hospitality might have generated diplomatic impact. The titles of the King and Queens' Bedrooms in particular established a completely different persona both in terms of diplomatic hospitality and the Kennedy's American iconography.

The Queen's Bedroom at the White House was given its formal name after five European queens had visited the United States (fig. 81).¹⁵⁵ These queens included, "Great Britain's Elizabeth, the current Queen Mother; her daughter, Queen Elizabeth II; the Netherlands' Wilhelmina and Juliana; and Greece's Frederika."¹⁵⁶ Both of the "Queen" bedrooms at the White House and Blair House represented a feminine quality while Blair House's King's Bedroom and the White House's Lincoln Bedroom characterized masculinity. Naming rooms at Blair House with the names of rooms at the White House establish a formality and strong connection to the White House prestige. The use of monarchical terminology not only initiated diplomatic comfort levels of foreign guests, but it served as a defining mechanism for the Kennedy image. According to an English

¹⁵⁵ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 175.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

newspaper, “‘Jacqueline Kennedy ha[d] given the American people from this day on one thing they had always lacked – majesty.’”¹⁵⁷ Known for her “queen” like qualities and mannerisms, Mrs. Kennedy initiated for herself a personal decorum that exemplified a democratic royalism.¹⁵⁸ She carried herself in a way no other twentieth-century first lady had done before her. As an editor, later in her life, Mrs. Kennedy fascinated herself with the aristocratic and European way of life and “commissioned more than a dozen books on kings, queens, royal courts[, and] royal patronage of the arts.”¹⁵⁹ Mrs. Kennedy had always been inspired by royal protocol and found it necessary to incorporate elements of it within the American presidency. Though some found this completely un-American in nature, the majority of Americans received the new changes quite well and it helped to strengthen national pride and interest in historic America. Kennedy scholar William Kuhn expressed Americans appreciation of Mrs. Kennedy’s personal protocol. A prime example of their appreciation for her self-conduction became apparent during the funeral of President Kennedy. According to Kuhn, Americans loved “Jackie’s planning of the 1963 funeral and her own performance at it [was] the closest things Americans had ever witnessed to a royal ritual. Universally, people felt she had single-handedly saved both the nation and the world from prolonged despondency as a result.”¹⁶⁰ Though she was strong willed and driven as an intellect, she understood and felt extremely aware of the

¹⁵⁷ *London Evening Standard*, quoted in Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images*, 104.

¹⁵⁸ William Kuhn, *Reading Jackie: Her Autobiography in Books* (New York: Nan A. Talese/ Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc., 2010), 3167.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3167.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3164.

importance with her national image. She found interest with Maria Antoinette and Josephine de Beauharnais and found both their fashion and surroundings to be quite sophisticated. As an avid enthusiasts of “eighteenth-century art, history, ideas, style, and culture,...[her friends considered her] an eighteenth-century woman.”¹⁶¹ Though she strived to embody the mannerisms and etiquette of the aristocratic crowds, Mrs. Kennedy understood the importance to remain an American. When deciding on her inaugural gown,

“She knew well how people were willing to connect being beautifully dressed with self-indulgence and supposed blindness to the needs of others. [Thus,] she wanted the inaugural gown to be very simple, possibly white, ‘as it is the most ceremonial color,’ and added that [she] ‘supposed it’s undemocratic to wear a tiara – but something on the head.’”¹⁶²

The majority of her fascination with the “aesthetic that joined luxury goods” was the association of good manners and well-bred cultures surrounding them.¹⁶³ Together, President and Mrs. Kennedy conducted themselves in a manner that embodied an aristocratic and cultured life model. Identifying Blair House guest rooms with royal titles similar to the guest rooms at the White House, adhered the Kennedy’s personal preferences in the same way it did for their foreign guests. These rooms at the White House and Blair House were not only segregated for foreign kings and queens, but also for the Kennedys. Mrs. Kennedy herself slept in the Queen’s Bedroom at the White House for several weeks after arriving in 1961.¹⁶⁴ Replicating the names of the bedrooms

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 2149.

¹⁶² Ibid., 3189.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 3620.

¹⁶⁴ Abbott and Rice, *Designing Camelot: The Kennedy White House Restoration*, 175.

at Blair House with those at the White House not only recognized the importance of diplomatic hospitality, but it emulated the Kennedy White House and highlighted the Kennedys' "American royalty" persona. A democratic persona such as theirs, elected by the American people, offered a cultured and sophisticated life centered on traditional Euro-American design.



Figure 85 Queen's Bedroom, White House. August 28, 1963. View of the Queen's Bedroom (also called Rose Guest Room). White House Washington, D.C. Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

CONCLUSION: A DIPLOMATIC EXTENSION OF THE WHITE HOUSE

On October 22, 1964, Blair House celebrated its completed renovation by holding a reception for all of its donors. Due to the death of President Herbert Hoover, Mrs. Johnson could not attend.¹⁶⁵ In her place, Mrs. Duke provided the remarks for the ceremony and thanked everyone for their dedication and hard work. By the time the renovation had been completed, “Secretary Wirtz called the house “Robin’s Nest.”¹⁶⁶ Though Mrs. Johnson continued and encouraged the efforts to finish Mrs. Kennedy’s vision of an updated and proper guest house for the President, Mrs. Duke led the project (fig. 86). It seemed appropriate she spoke on behalf of the entire project’s completion. Like Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Duke was never just a wife decorating her husband’s place of work. Before her time at Blair House, she began her career “as a writer on women’s issues” at the New York *Journal-American*.¹⁶⁷ Becoming the US Ambassador to Norway later in her life, Mrs. Duke continued to develop her career with a variety of high profile positions. Aside from her director roles with different foundations, vice chairman positions, and membership with the Council on Foreign Relations, she continued with work in the arts by serving as the Co-Chair of the Millennium Project of the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies project “to make a gift to the nation of 200 works of original American art.”¹⁶⁸ Her drive to make Blair

¹⁶⁵ Wilroy and Prinz, *Inside Blair House*, 149.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁶⁷ “Council of American Ambassadors,” accessed November 19, 2015, <https://www.americanambassadors.org/members/robin-c-duke>.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

House an extension of the Kennedy White House contributed to the house's impeccable interiors.



Figure 86 Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Duke conversing in front of Blair House, Blair House, The President's Guest House. Ca 1965. Cover image of *House & Garden* magazine in January of 1965.

In January of 1965, *House & Garden* magazine published their article titled "Only in America" and Mrs. Duke's article titled "Blair House." Covering each space renovated

since the project began in 1963, the nationally published article culminated the end of the Kennedy 1960s renovation project. Photographer Tom Leonard created the magazine's photographic journey of the newly updated Blair House. Shortly after the inauguration of President Johnson in 1965, Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke had been named Ambassador to Spain. President Johnson's first elected term and the Duke's appointment to Spain marked the end of the Kennedy and Duke era at Blair House. Mrs. Duke handed over her role as Chairman of the BHFAC to Mrs. Ann Hand, wife of the newly appointed U.S. Chief of Protocol. Mrs. Duke worked as the last agent to mark the Kennedy influence on Blair House. Though she left in 1965, Mrs. Johnson still sought to improve Blair House and served as the Honorary Chairman of the BHFAC. She and Mrs. Hand continued to renovate other areas of Blair House and acquire new pieces for the permanent State Department collection. Mrs. Johnson successfully acquired a Steinway piano from the Steinway family in 1967 (fig. 87, 88). In participating of such deeds, she continued to respect the legacy of Ms. Kennedy and constantly supported work which improved the White House complex and Blair House.



Figure 87 Mrs. Johnson with Mr. Henry Z. Steinway (Mrs. Johnson accepts the Steinway's donation of a Steinway piano for Blair House), Blair House, The President's Guest House. June 1967. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.



Figure 88 Mrs. Johnson with members of the Steinway family and friends (Mrs. Johnson accepts the Steinway's donation of a Steinway piano for Blair House), Blair House, The President's Guest House. June 1967. Office of the Curator, Blair House, The President's Guest House, U.S. Department of State.

America's aesthetic heritage was a popular theme during the Blair House remodeling and the Kennedy era. As stated in the 1965 *House & Garden* article, the "national Guest House, expresse[d] our desire to like and be liked, to please and be pleased, that [was] a natural extension of our national attitudes."¹⁶⁹ These national attitudes centered on interests pertaining to early roots of America near and around the American Revolution and the early nineteenth century. Similar to the early twentieth century's Colonial Revival, influenced by the development of Colonial Williamsburg and individuals such as First Lady Grace Coolidge, Wallace Nutting, and Henry Francis du Pont, the 1960s White House complex experienced a Federal Revival.¹⁷⁰ President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy strongly initiated such a revival in Washington. President Kennedy's plan for the General Services Administration Art in Architecture Program,

"strongly endorsed a report on Federal architecture emphasizing that the design of new buildings should provide 'visual testimony to the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American government.' [President Kennedy's] report, which introduced The Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, also stated that '...where appropriate, fine art should be incorporated in the designs [of Federal buildings], with emphasis on the work of living American artists.' [Thus, the program] was then established to commission American artists to integrate their creative contributions in meaningful ways with an equally vibrant federal architecture."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ "Only In America," *House & Garden*, January 1965, 87.

¹⁷⁰ Rather than an interest with early seventeenth century America and its original colonies, the Kennedy White House was far more interested in the federal style near the time of the American Revolution. Within his chapter titled, "What Is the Colonial Revival?," Richard Guy Wilson states many different definitions of the Colonial Revival. Generally speaking, the Colonial Revival is defined as a time when people are heavily interested in America's past.

¹⁷¹ "Arts and Culture in the Kennedy White House - John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum," accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Arts-and-Culture-in-the-Kennedy-White-House.aspx>.

In highlighting more of the federal-style within the White House complex and Blair House, a direct connection was made with our American heritage, “historic tradition, artistic maturity, national pride and practical politics.”¹⁷²

Mrs. Duke worded it most eloquently when she expressed in her article, “the hospitality of Blair House is the hospitality of a whole nation. In full operation, Blair House is also a constructive working arm of American diplomacy.”¹⁷³ From the basic needs of razors, breakfast trays, television sets, and radios to the more formal historic and reproduction furnishings, the outdated 1940s Blair House did not meet the standards required by the Kennedys. Simple necessities, luxuries amenities, and privacy remained key to Mrs. Kennedy. She even went as far as to demand the government to brick over windows of the New Eisenhower Office Building which faced Blair House’s rear garden. She concerned herself most with the President’s comfort and privacy.

On June 9, 1963, during the beginning phases of the renovation, Pat Saltonstall, a staff writer for the *Sunday Star*, published an article titled, “Diplomatically Speaking: Blair House Not Quite Fit for Kings.” The article addressed the need for Blair House to receive a “facelifting” able to uphold the integrity of the early nineteenth-century home and “preserve the warm and traditional character for which Blair House is known.”¹⁷⁴ The most significant aspect of the article was not so much its content, but rather its title. The article stated truth when it mentioned Blair House as a guest house not quite fit for

¹⁷² Robin C. L. Duke, “Blair House,” *House & Garden*, January 1965, 87.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁷⁴ Pat Saltonstall, “Diplomatically Speaking: Blair House Not Quite Fit For Kings,” *The Sunday Star*, June 9, 1963, sec. Society-Home.

kings or queens. The author might not have realized that Blair House was also not quite fit for America's king and queen. With their American royal persona, the Kennedys more than anyone required a sophisticated and cultured American image both in the White House and across the street. The President's Guest House served as a direct reflection of the presidency and the White House's extended hand of hospitality. In restoring and re-designing the White House and Blair House, "traditional," hospitable, and diplomatic environments were deemed suitable for both President and Mrs. Kennedy, America's king and queen, and foreign kings and queens (fig. 89).



Figure 89 Arrival Ceremonies for Muhammad Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan. July 11, 1961. (L – R) President Mohammad Ayub Khan; First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy; Begum Nasir Akhtar Aurangzeb, daughter of President Ayub Khan; President John F. Kennedy; unidentified girl, man, and military officer in background. Blair House, Washington, D.C. Abbie Rowe. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

In her letter to Mrs. Duke on April 7, 1963, Mrs. Kennedy made it clear both she and Mrs. Duke “know [the renovation] must keep the same feeling as Blair House and the White House.”¹⁷⁵ Here, a small piece of history has gone unnoticed in terms of Blair House’s extension of the White House aesthetic and Mrs. Kennedy’s broad renovation and rejuvenation of the White House complex. Within an era of redefining the allure of the American presidency, dignified government protocol, stately hospitality, and the iconography of America’s “traditional” heritage, Blair House served as the most prominent “traditional” American residence apart from the White House. From its 1960s renovation, it became a residence made fit for all kings and queens.

¹⁷⁵ Jacqueline Kennedy, “Letter from Mrs. Kennedy to Mrs. Duke (Letter Regarding Mrs. Kennedy’s Involvement with the Blair House Restoration),” April 7, 1963, Blair House, The President’s Guest House.

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BIOGRAPHY

John S. Botello graduated from Lighthouse Academy, Roswell, New Mexico in 2008. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Interior Design and Architecture Minor from Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, in 2013.